



# Mentoring as a Tool for Connecting Disconnected Youth to Education & Employment

## Citation

Flaxman, Laura Ann. 2015. Mentoring as a Tool for Connecting Disconnected Youth to Education & Employment. Doctoral dissertation, Harvard Graduate School of Education.

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**Mentoring as a Tool for Connecting Disconnected Youth to Education & Employment**

Doctor of Education Leadership (Ed.L.D.)  
Capstone

Submitted by

Laura Ann Flaxman

To the Harvard Graduate School of Education  
in partial fulfillment of the graduation requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education Leadership

May 2015

For my father, Andrew Flaxman, who taught me about the power of love and  
what it means to believe in the unlimited potential in us all.

1935-2014

With gratitude and love.

## Acknowledgments

This capstone is the result of the support and assistance of so many people.

Thank you to my fabulous Ed.L.D. Cohort 3 peers for being the supportive and wonderful extended family that you have become for me. Thank you to my terrific peer coach, Bob Ettinger; my awesome pod mates, Jamal Fields and Stephanie Myers; fellow residency entrepreneurs Dorian Burton, Brian Barnes, and Doannie Tran; Cuba buddies and more Ventura Rodriguez, Jenn Charlot, Suchi Saxena; Transformers Ansel Sanders, Jeremiah Newell, Mari Grimes, and Bob Ettinger; my two other mom/leader friends Zoe Stemm-Calderon and Dilara Sayeed; and everyone else: Alex, Anda, Brian R., Jefferson, Kelly, Landon, Matt, Pete, Raychael, Thalia . The greatest gift of this program, among many gifts, was that of 24 new wonderful friends as well as colleagues.

Thanks to the Ed.L.D. program, fellow students in other cohorts, faculty and staff, and in particular to the Director and my advisor, Liz City, for your excellent advising and support since I started the program, including all the great feedback on ICN and this capstone.

Thanks to my wonderful mentor, residency supervisor, and capstone committee member, Kathy Schultz, Dean of the Mills College School of Education. I'm so lucky to have met you and had the privilege to work with you this year.

Thank you to the many, many people who worked with me on this project and provided advice, ideas and feedback: my third committee member and entrepreneur Greg Gunn, Harvard Business School professor Alnoor Ebrahim, Gerald Chertavian, Tim Freundlich, Tim Dibble, Keenan Davis, Paul Wong, Mona Baksh, Martina Agredano, José de Jesus Torres, José Cardenas, Mary Nisa, Daisy Barrera, Vanessa Leon, Jacquoia Gray, Thalia Jauregui, Diana Rojas, Olis Simmons, Krishen Laetsch, Tedde Tsang, Sage Ruth, Tarlin Ray, Nicole Simon, Caroline Hirasawa, Emma Paulino, and the many, many others who met with me along the way and provided guidance, feedback and advice, including all those mentioned in Appendix B. Thank you, HBS Authentic Leadership Development Professor Scott Snook. Of course, a huge thank you to my nine pilot students for letting me into your lives and allowing me to learn with and from you.

Thank you to my mother, Ruth Flaxman, for applying her editing skills to a final read of this capstone.

Thank you to my wonderful family and extended family who provided me with the foundation to become the person that I am today: Andrew Flaxman, Ruth Flaxman, Constance Gill, Caroline Hirasawa, Gary Flaxman, Helen Flaxman,

Asti Antikainen, Flaxman aunts, uncles and cousins, the Robbins and Meyerowitz clan and the Isenbergs and Wailoos. With love and appreciation to you, Jo-Anne Henry, Anita Rivera, Liz Pokrassa Tel-Or, Sasha Edwards, Maureen Baksh, Cynthia Rosario, Paola Vita, Hae-Sin Thomas, Phineas Baxandall, Romeo Garcia, Hazlyn Fortune, Michele Chase Kashap, and Ethan Flad for your lifelong friendship.

Thank you to my spouse, Kenny Purser, for your incredible support and love, especially during the two cross-country moves and three years of the Ed.L.D. program, and to my amazing daughters, Ava Helene Flaxman Purser and Aziza Flaxman Purser. I hope that my work and efforts to make the world a better place inspire you and allow you to forgive me for all the time away from home.

With love and appreciation to you all.

## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Review of Knowledge for Action</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Strategic Project</b>	<b>36</b>
<i>Description</i>	<i>36</i>
<i>Results</i>	<i>49</i>
<i>Analysis</i>	<i>55</i>
<b>Implications for Self</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>Implications for Site</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>Implications for Sector</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>105</b>

## **Abstract**

Too many young people are not on meaningful college or career pathways at a time when the workforce increasingly demands a higher level of education and skills. While a lack of education is a major barrier to employment, there are not enough alternatives to the one-size-fits-all high school to college trajectory that leaves 60% of Americans without any kind of college degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). It is extremely difficult to get back on that pathway after leaving school, with the major barriers being finances, a lack of relevance/un-engaging coursework, and poor or nonexistent advising. The Innovation College Network was created to address these issues, developing a new higher education model that blends workforce development, education, and employment with intensive mentoring and support for young people between the ages of 16 and 26.

This capstone describes a pilot of the Innovation College Network, which included nine young people ranging in age from 18 to 30 who were not in school at the start of their engagement with the program. They received ongoing one-on-one mentoring focused on helping them identify and pursue educational and career goals. All nine showed some movement toward their goals, with three reenrolling in school, and the majority reporting that the mentoring was beneficial. For these older youth, mentoring appears to be an effective strategy, particularly when the relationships are centered on active listening with the purpose of fostering self-awareness, motivation, values, a

support network, and living an integrated life. These five areas are the building blocks of authentic leadership development (George, 2007).

Implications include the potential and importance of prioritizing older youth, of building mentoring relationships into existing educational programs, of creating new alternative higher education models, of bridging the gaps between education and the workforce, and of taking a more holistic approach to education at all levels.



## Introduction

*The value of a college degree is as high as it has ever been, and not just for white collar professionals. More jobs than ever before, across a variety of sectors and at varying levels of experience, now require a postsecondary degree. Yet despite the rising value of a college education, the United States is for the first time losing its lead in producing college graduates, raising serious concerns about the nation's future prosperity and the economic mobility of millions of Americans.*

---University Innovation Alliance Vision and Prospectus (University Innovation Alliance, 2014)

As a K-12 educator for more than twenty years, I was rather shockingly unaware of the details of the connections between education and employment. Instead, as is true for many educators focused on the shorter-term goals of student achievement in the daily and yearly life of a school, my main priority was educational attainment and the corresponding economic benefits, and how to get students to achieve that attainment. I knew that for students in poverty, a college education was an excellent way to break the cycle and achieve financial success, among other things, and indeed, according to Chronicle of Higher Education editor Jeffery Selingo, college graduates earn 33% more than college dropouts. Furthermore, Selingo notes:

Since the turn of the century, average wages for high-school graduates—who today make up about half of the adult population—have fallen considerably to just over \$19,000, below the federal poverty level for a family of four... A four-year college degree is the best ticket—and perhaps the only ticket—for kids from the poorest families to get ahead. (Selingo, 2013, p. IX).

My main goal was thus to help students earn their high school and college degrees, and the best way that I knew to do this was to try to capture students' interest and passion in achieving these goals by making their educational program as interesting, engaging, and meaningful as I could. However, for many students in the U.S.—indeed, for the majority— the

traditional and relatively narrow pathway to a higher education degree isn't a viable one, with only 40% of American adults earning a college degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013).

Since coming to the Ed.L.D. program, I've become increasingly interested in higher education and its potential role as a space in which to innovate and more closely address the connections between educational programs, engagement, degree attainment, and employment. It is these relationships that are at the foundation of the Innovation College Network design, a new higher education model that I am creating that blends education, employment and workforce development through personalized, one-on-one mentoring and advising. The Innovation College Network, and the mentoring at its core, is the main focus of my residency, strategic project, and capstone. This capstone will first describe the interconnected problems of the high cost, disconnected content, and low graduation rates in higher education, and the unmet educational needs of employers, followed by some background information about the context of the Innovation College Network and my strategic project. Next, the Review of Knowledge for Action will examine existing solutions and alternatives in the current landscape, the potential of work-based learning and mentoring, and the developmental needs of disengaged youth in particular. The subsequent sections will describe the mentoring strategic project that comprises the Innovation College Network pilot, including the results and analysis of what occurred. Finally, I will explore the implications for myself, the Innovation College Network, and the education sector as a whole.

### Project Background

My interest in building the Innovation College Network has a lot to do with my past experience as a high school teacher and serial high school founder. In spite of the many successes that I can claim, there are still many young people with whom I worked that I wasn't able to put on the path of higher education or meaningful careers. For too many of the low-income students of color in the high schools I started, the obstacles to the traditional four-year college pathway—and the accompanying career pathways—were too significant for them to overcome. In some of my early research as I began to think about creating a new higher education model, I looked into the reasons for why people didn't pursue or complete a higher education degree. Young people are dropping out of high school and/or not enrolling in college for a number of reasons, including a lack of engagement with school, financial challenges, and personal issues. According to a survey commissioned by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, “nearly half (47 percent) said a major reason for dropping out [of high school] was that classes were not interesting” and “a third (32 percent) said they had to get a job and make money” (Bridgeland, Dilulio, Jr., & Burke Morison, 2006). The opportunity cost alone causes young people to drop out at the high school level; at the college level when school is no longer free, the challenge of attending school at the expense of earning an income is exacerbated by the cost of tuition. A Pew Research Center report found that the main reason that more Americans are

not earning college degrees is financial: “Among adults ages 18 to 34 who are not in school and do not have a bachelor’s degree, two-thirds say a major reason for not continuing their education is the need to support a family” (Taylor, et al., 2011, p. 1). Furthermore, 57% reported that they preferred to work and earn money and 48% said that they couldn’t afford to go to college (Taylor, et al., 2011).

In my interviews with people who didn’t go to or complete college, the same three areas highlighted in the Gates report of finances, engagement/relevance, and support came up repeatedly, although financial obstacles were cited as the biggest of their obstacles. Often these areas are interconnected, as described by one of my interviewees, Marvina Baksh: “It was just too much between working and taking care of my kid and going to school and not having a support system” (Baksh, 2013). For Marvina, her responsibilities required her to work, which was hard to do while going to school, but with the right support she would have made it through. Paul Wong, a former student of mine from Brooklyn, New York, observed that of the people he knew who went to college, most of whom didn’t complete a degree, “no one was doing exactly what it was that they went to school for” anyway, raising the question of the connection between school and people’s lives and work afterwards (Wong, 2013). After talking about the problems of financing a college education and the debt involved, Paul said that the only way that he would be able to go back to school at this point was if someone held his hand and walked him through it step by step (Wong, 2013). These conversations, as well as my other research, led me to come up with a design

that was based on addressing these three primary areas of need: cost, relevance, and support. A mix of apprenticeships and mentoring, which defines the Innovation College Network idea, addresses each of these areas.

Initially, as I researched creating a new higher education model that would better serve the population that has been historically as well as currently the least well-served by our education system—low-income, out-of-school students of color—I mostly examined the student experience and educational side, without considering the employer landscape and the skills and knowledge that those who are hiring are looking for in their employees. This led to one of my early research questions: What skills, knowledge and training do young people require upon entering the workforce? Since delving into this project, I added further research questions such as:

- What do young people who lack credentials, education and skills need to gain in order to provide value to employers?
- What educational tools and services would transform an underutilized sector of the population into a valuable workforce?
- What innovative programs in higher education and workforce development are focused on increasing access to higher education and preparing students for the workforce?
- How can quality advising and mentoring reconnect youth to viable and positive career and education pathways?

As I refined my strategic project to fit within the limited time constraints of the ten-month residency, I began to focus more narrowly on mentoring as the main instructional strategy of the Innovation College Network, with my strategic project centering around the last of my research questions, while continuing to be informed by the others: How can quality advising and

mentoring reconnect youth to viable and positive career and education pathways?

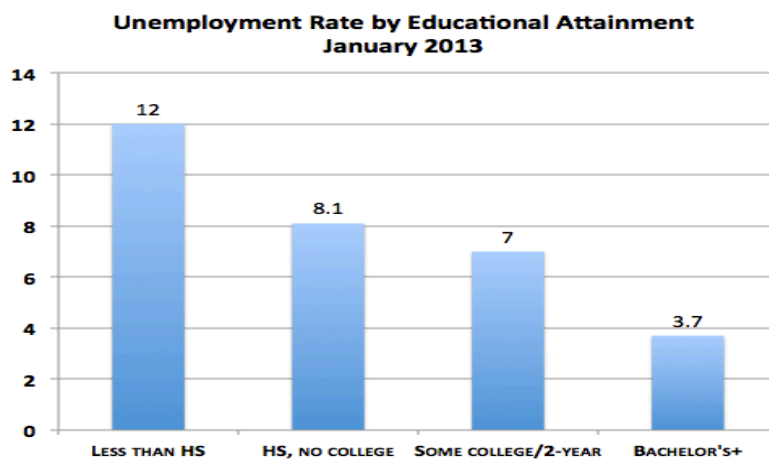
Since the mentoring in my project was targeted toward supporting students in attaining education and career goals, and the latter is where I see the greatest need and where I have focused the bulk of my strategic project, this capstone includes research on the needs of employers and the challenges of our current reality. Examining employer requirements helps to illustrate the need for mentoring—and potentially other methods—that help to bridge the gap between young people and the meaningful careers and successful lives to which they aspire. I have also tried to clearly identify the interrelated problems of low educational attainment, unemployment, and an underprepared workforce, and how these problems affect our economy and society.

### *Problem and Context*

The United States has a problem with educational attainment, even while the world and the workplace increasingly seek those with post-secondary degrees and credentials. The majority of American adults currently do not earn post-secondary degrees (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). There are corresponding economic and social implications of this lack of educational attainment and the advantages of having a well-educated population are significant both at the individual and social levels. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, income levels are directly and substantially correlated with educational attainment (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Simply put, the more

educated you are, the higher your salary will be (this benefit falls off at the doctoral level but holds true from high school diplomas through master's and professional degrees). The converse is true for unemployment statistics; in spite of the issues of unemployment among college graduates, the overall rates for college graduates are much lower than for those with lower levels of educational attainment, as shown in the chart below (Thompson, 2013).

*Figure 1: Unemployment Rate by Educational Attainment*



(Thompson, 2013)

As the overall income gap in the U.S. grows, there is a related and expanding gap between levels of educational attainment. While in the past, the middle class included a significant number of individuals with low levels of educational attainment, today this is less and less likely to be the case. Those without a college degree—whether they have some college, a high school diploma or dropped out of high school, are “on the down escalator of social mobility, falling out of the middle-income class and into the lower three deciles of family income” (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010, p. 3). The link between the lack of educational attainment and poverty is a strong one.

In addition, the social costs of an undereducated populace are similarly considerable, particularly for those who don't finish high school. According to a 2003 study, "A 1% increase in the high school completion rate of all men ages 20-60 would save the United States as much as \$1.4 billion per year in reduced costs from crime incurred by victims and society at large" (Lochner & Moretti, 2004). This statistic just refers to the cost in crime, never mind the broader opportunity cost of people who could be fully contributing to their communities civically and economically (Belfield, Levin, & Rosen, 2012). The stakes are high for the United States to pay attention to increasing the levels of educational attainment nationwide, as both the costs and the benefits of having, or not having, a well-educated populace are significant and far-reaching. Furthermore, when higher education data is looked at using an international lens, the crisis becomes even more obvious. While the United States used to be a leader in higher education, graduating a higher percentage of its population than other countries, that edge has almost completely disappeared. The number of college graduates are growing, but not at as high a rate as in other countries. The percentage of Americans earning college degrees is below the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) average, with thirteen countries surpassing us (OECD, 2012). This disparity will only grow given our comparatively slow rate of increase in college graduation rates. In turn, American companies are looking to other countries to find more highly educated employees.



## **Review of Knowledge for Action**

Given the complexity of the interrelated problems of an undereducated populace, increasing educational needs demanded by employers, a lack of educational attainment, and a dearth of alternative higher education and workforce development models, there is a need for new and innovative solutions. In this Review of Knowledge for Action, I will further examine the problem of the disconnect between education and the workforce, as well as explore some of the new initiatives in higher education and workforce development and best practices for engaging youth, including mentoring in particular.

### **The Gap Between Education and the Workforce**

For economic as well as societal reasons, such as the relationship between education and crime mentioned in the introduction, it is important to figure out how to create stronger pathways between the American populace and the institutions that would employ them, and while there are problematic implications of the current disconnect on the national, societal, and individual level, it is a growing concern on the part of employers as well.

There is a significant gap between current levels of educational attainment and increasing requirements on the part of employers. According to a recent Brookings report, “In the 100 largest metropolitan areas, 43 percent of job openings typically require at least a bachelor’s degree, but just 32 percent of adults 25 and older have earned one” (Rothwell, 2012, p. 1). This mismatch is only going to increase, according to another report, The

Future of the U.S. Workforce: “Overall, organizations across all industries are projecting that future jobs at all levels will require more skills, education and credentials/certifications, with varying degrees of magnitude” (Society for Human Resource Management; Achieve, 2012, p. 4). Gleaned from interviews with more than 4,000 Human Resource professionals in a range of businesses and organizations, even in the diminishing number of jobs where the job posting states that a lower level of education is needed, the majority of respondents stated that they usually hire the applicants whose levels of educational attainment are higher than what was posted. Already an issue, the gap between employer needs and the credentials of the American populace is continuing to grow. Americans are not earning the degrees that the workforce is demanding.

For those who do pursue formal education, there is still a disconnect between how most post-secondary institutions are structured and what they’re providing for their students and the needs of the workforce. In a recent report on community colleges and workforce preparation, the authors identified three gaps in the workforce preparation offered by community colleges: a “skills gap,” a “degree target gap,” and a “planning gap” (ACT, Inc, 2013). Students aren’t being taught the skills that employers need; the degrees that they are earning don’t match the positions that are available in the surrounding communities; and what people seek to study when they enter community colleges is not putting them on the path to sustainable job opportunities (ACT, Inc, 2013). While this particular report focused on community colleges, this is true for students at four-year institutions as well.

Even for those students who are pursuing their education after high school, the pipelines to the workforce and the types of degrees and education needed are not well-defined, highlighting the same short-sightedness of which I myself was guilty. There is too little communication between educational institutions and the workforce and even for those students who are doing what they are exhorted to do, continuing their education and pursuing the American dream, the system is still not preparing them for today's – never mind tomorrow's— careers (ACT, Inc, 2013; Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010; Mourshed, Farrell, & Barton, 2013; Rosenberg, Heimler, & Morote, 2012).

In spite of the shortcomings of existing post-secondary educational programs, a higher education degree communicates certain assumptions about a potential employee's aptitudes, abilities and potential. For example, regardless of my skills, a degree from Harvard leads people to automatically assume that I would be a high quality candidate. The more elite and respected the institution, the greater this effect. However, across the board, similar assumptions are made about those with a bachelor's degree as compared to those without a bachelor's degree or those without a high school diploma. A certain level of potential is assumed based on an individual's credentials, which may or may not be warranted. For many reasons, increasing the percentage of individuals attaining college degrees would be of benefit to individuals, to society, and to our economy.

While employers are increasingly looking for employees with college and graduate degrees, there is a related but different question of what skill

and content knowledge employers need. A report from the McKinsey Global Institute found that the majority of new jobs require “complex interactions,” defined as “exchanges involving complex problem solving, experience, context,” rather than “routine production or transaction work” (Manyika, Lund, August, & Ramas, 2012, p. 2). In the United States, “nearly all net new job creation over the past decade has been in interaction jobs; nearly five million interaction jobs were created between 2000 and 2009, while more than three million production and transaction jobs disappeared” (Manyika, Lund, August, & Ramas, 2012, p. 2). Interaction jobs include those filled by professionals such as lawyers, doctors, and teachers, as well as customer service representatives, salespeople, and managers, while transaction jobs include factory work and manual labor (Manyika, Lund, August, & Ramas, 2012). This decline in production and transaction jobs is largely due to advances in technology that has diminished the need for low-skilled workers. At the same time, across professions, people who use technology in their work earn more than those who don’t, as compared to those with the same educational level (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010). Exacerbating this problem is the growing income gap, with those operating in low-skilled, production and transactional jobs earning increasingly less as compared to workers in jobs requiring complex interactions.

In addition to higher education degrees and job-specific technical skills, employers also identify a myriad array of “soft skills” that they look for in their potential employees. In a study conducted in 2011 and 2012 based on the perspectives of 57 executives, the following soft skills were identified as most

important for employees to have: communication, courtesy, flexibility, integrity, interpersonal skills, positive attitude, professionalism, responsibility, teamwork, and work ethic (Robles, 2012). Oftentimes, these skills trump hard skills, in that if employees have a strong work ethic, sense of professionalism and responsibility, for example, they will apply themselves diligently to attaining whatever hard skills might be lacking.

Venturing outside of the U.S. leads us to another list of “employability skills” as defined by the Australian Chamber of Industry and Commerce and Business Council of Australia. They are doing work to further define and operationalize terms, but these skills are broadly identified as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, initiative and enterprise, planning and organizing, self-management, learning, and technology (Wibrow, 2011). Phrased differently and with some discrepancies, these lists attempt to name similar attributes. However you break these soft skills down, it is striking to me how little attention we pay to fostering any of these qualities in our current educational system, at either the secondary or post-secondary levels.

A study of a business school in Southern California using surveys of graduates, professors, and recruiters found that each of these three groups had different perspectives on a set of “basic employability skills” in this case defined as:

- 1) basic literacy and numeracy skills;
- (2) critical thinking skills;
- (3) management skills;
- (4) leadership skills;
- (5) interpersonal skills;
- (6) information technology skills;
- (7) systems thinking skills; and

(8) work ethic disposition (Rosenberg, Heimler, & Morote, 2012).

Consistent with the overall disconnect between education and the workforce, each of the three groups ranked the importance of these skills differently, highlighting the root problem of industry and education existing in silos without communicating with one another about bridging this important divide. As the authors of this study explain: “From a systems perspective, education and industry are interrelated; the output of the education system is the input of industry” (Rosenberg, Heimler, & Morote, 2012, p. 16). This seems obvious, but I know that I personally had never thought in these terms before. Furthermore, the authors continue, “In this business relationship, the supplier has to understand what skills the customer needs. If these groups work in a vacuum, then quality employees will not be available” (Rosenberg, Heimler, & Morote, 2012, p. 16). For the most part, educators and employers often do work in a vacuum without communicating with one another and collaborating to ensure that there are effective pathways between education and the workforce.

As is evident in college degree attainment data, traditional higher education institutions are not graduating enough students to stem the decline in our international competitiveness. Not only are too few young people embarking on the four-year college pathway but among those who do matriculate, almost half drop out (Selingo, 2013). Furthermore, those that do earn their degrees are not necessarily graduating with the skills that employers need. The shortcomings of our current model of higher education are manifesting themselves in different ways and at different levels of society.

While it is true that too few Americans are earning degrees, even for those on the path toward a college degree, the value proposition is increasingly problematic, given constantly rising costs, corresponding high debt, and the lack of connection to the workplace.

While there is some debate about whether or not higher education is the solution for all, there is an irrefutable need for new and alternative educational programs that help young people prepare for and gain access to career pathways. Given the individual, societal, and economic benefits of a higher education, I believe that alternative college programs should and could be the solution for many more Americans than is currently the case. There are 6.1 million young people between the ages of 16 and 24 in this country who are not in school and not in the workforce, representing both a notable economic cost of almost \$100 billion per year as well as a significant opportunity (Belfield, Levin, & Rosen, 2012). Figuring out ways to engage this population and tap the tremendous potential that they hold could transform the economic, political, and social future of our nation. While on a small scale, this is the problem that I am trying to solve through my strategic project, the creation of the Innovation College Network, and this capstone.

### *Higher Education and Workforce Development Initiatives*

Given the reality described above, there is a proliferation of new alternative higher education programs, much of them also fueled by opportunities afforded by technological advances (most are built around online education platforms). I researched and interviewed the founders and staff at five of these institutions: Minerva, University Now, Watson University,

Portmont College (now Mount Saint Mary's Online), and College Unbound. I also researched several existing alternative institutions: Empire State College, Goddard College, and University of Southern New Hampshire's new creation, College for America. Emphasizing the importance of finding more sustainable financial models, it is not surprising that all of these organizations have figured out at the very least a less expensive price point for their programs as compared with traditional degree programs, if not an innovative way of finding alternative resources. They also have in common the creation of a new instructional program that is designed to be less expensive to run (such as through on-line classes, limited on-campus programming, and using the workplace or the surrounding city as classrooms) and responsive to the unique needs of their populations. While each of these institutions has interesting and valuable components, none of them provide employment as part of their model, although several target working adults.

Although these higher education models do not directly address employment issues and workforce development, there are a number of organizations outside of higher education that do. The model that is closest to my strategic project, merging workforce development, employment, and higher education, is Year Up, a year-long program for high school graduates that provides them job training and internships, as well as community college credit. Year Up is also notable in that it is the only organization that I researched where the employers paid for their interns (Chertavian, 2012; Chertavian, 2014). The more typical workforce development organizations that work with out-of-school youth, such as Youth Uprising in Oakland, CA,



and New Door Ventures in San Francisco, CA, raise money to pay for their students' internships at no cost to the employing organizations. These programs all make some progress toward preparing young people to enter the workforce, which is their focus. However, for the most part, students in these programs do not earn academic credit (in the places where they do, it's usually minimal), thereby not helping to raise the percentage of Americans earning degrees.

Another notable program is Northeastern University's Cooperative Education and Career Development program. Unlike most colleges and universities, Northeastern has a robust internship program that helps to prepare their students for the workforce. Drexel University has a well-respected co-op program as well. However, these initiatives still exist within the more traditional four-year college model, working with students who have already progressed along the standard four-year college trajectory, and the work-based component comprises only a small part of the overall academic program: more or less six months out of four years of study.

While there are some promising new and alternative organizations in both the higher education and workforce development worlds, none are trying to seamlessly blend education, employment, and workforce development. Moreover, none of the higher education models have a focus on the more than 6 million disengaged, out-of-school youth, preferring to target either young people who have never left school or older adults who are returning to school. With so many issues to try to address within the higher education

landscape, these institutions have many other potential students that they can target who come to them with better preparation and college readiness.

### Work-Based Learning

Many of the same arguments that I make for blending education and workforce development—as well as focusing on the population of young people who have not typically been among the college-bound—have been made by Jobs for the Future’s Nancy Hoffman. Hoffman (2011) emphasizes the need for creating a new approach to educating older youth that has work-based learning at its core. She writes, “the most intensive forms of workplace learning—apprenticeships and sustained internships—are especially effective in meeting the developmental needs of young people” (Hoffman, 2011, p. 14). Hoffman bases her argument on a study of vocational education and training (VET) programs in other countries where there are well-structured systems of apprenticeships blended with more traditional schooling that prepare young people for both college and careers and bear little to no resemblance to what we call vocational education in this country (Hoffman, 2011). In the United States, we have created an artificial and detrimental dichotomy between academic and vocational education pathways. Particularly at a time when most vocations require higher order thinking skills and advanced knowledge, vocational and academic training shouldn’t be mutually exclusive. In many other countries, such as Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Norway, there is a much more integrated approach that provides both work-based learning experiences as well as academic preparation with the result of higher graduation rates from these countries’ secondary institutions (which

are the equivalent of our post-secondary institutions) as well as greater job readiness (Hoffman, 2011).

In the United States, there is a growing interest in work-based learning as well, which is defined by experiences that have “direct, systemic employer and/or community input,” “depth of experience,” and “connection to the curriculum” (Darche, Nayar, & Bracco, 2009, p. 5). Educators and policymakers who have taken up the cause of work-based learning recognize that it is a way of providing learning opportunities that connect schools to the world beyond, engaging young people more fully in their education, and creating meaning and value of educational experiences beyond the educational institution (Darche, Nayar, & Bracco, 2009). Much of the work currently being done in this area targets secondary institutions rather than higher education.

There are other benefits to this approach beyond increased college and career readiness. Developmentally, apprenticeships and internships offer young people a supported way of transitioning between adolescence and adulthood, something that is currently not in place for the majority of young people who do not go away to a four-year college (Hoffman, 2011, p. 14). Furthermore, “[a]pprenticeships provide increasingly demanding responsibilities and challenges in an intergenerational work setting that lends a structure to each day” where “adult relationships are built on support and accountability, mentoring and supervision” (Hoffman, 2011, p. 14).

### *Mentoring as a Solution*

As mentioned by Nancy Hoffman as a benefit of apprenticeships, one high potential strategy for creating a successful model that integrates employment and education for disengaged youth is mentoring. Mentoring has been used successfully in both educational and work-based contexts, making it an excellent strategy to bridge the gap between the two and lead to success in both (Kram, 1988; Rhodes, 2002). As described earlier, there are some significant needs that employers have that the majority of the American workforce is underprepared to meet. There are also an insufficient number of programs that are addressing these needs. How might this gap be addressed, particularly for young people who have fallen off any viable career and educational pathway? How might we create solutions for the problems of employers while simultaneously improving educational and economic outcomes for those in the majority of the American population who are currently lacking college degrees? One answer to these questions lies in structuring programs based on relational learning, which can take different forms such as advising and mentoring. In both educational and workplace contexts, mentoring is a tremendously valuable and underutilized strategy for learning and achievement (Grossman & Tierney, 1998; Hadley, Mbwana, & Hair, 2010; Kram, 1988; Rhodes, 2002).

A large body of research exists on the mentoring of youth, as well as on the mentoring of adults in the workplace, although there is very little on the mentoring of older out-of-school youth and young adults. The most rigorous foundational study about mentoring youth was a randomized control trial measuring the effectiveness of the Big Brother/Big Sister program. The study

found that “Little Brothers and Little Sisters were less likely to have started using drugs or alcohol, felt more competent about doing school work, attended school more, got better grades, and had better relationships with their parents and peers than they would have had they not participated in the program” (Grossman & Tierney, 1998, p. 422). While the focus of this study was on the mentoring of 10-16 year-olds, it points to the potential of adult-youth mentoring as a general practice. A more recent study reviewed a number of different programs specifically focused on older youth as they move toward adulthood, finding that “education and career programs can be effective, especially for low income youth and for youth targeted from younger ages, for example, those under the age of 18” (Hadley, Mbwana, & Hair, 2010, p. 1). As the evaluations were of a number of different programs, the study analyzed the most promising practices, stating that “specific intervention strategies, such as mentoring, case management, and providing child care for young parents, are associated with program success across outcomes” (Hadley, Mbwana, & Hair, 2010, p. 1). The authors also call for more programs and research focused on young adults up to the age of 25, recognizing the unique needs of those transitioning to adulthood.

Having trusted and competent adults work with younger adults and older youth in a targeted way can help young people find their way toward a successful future. Adults who are not related to the young people they mentor can play a powerful role in their lives. According to researcher Jean Rhodes, mentors can affect their mentees’ development in three ways:

- by enhancing social skills and emotional well-being

- by improving cognitive skills through dialogue and listening
- by serving as a role model and advocate (Rhodes, 2002).

Strong relationships are required to achieve these outcomes, but the potential is clear and significant.

Workforce-based mentoring has also demonstrated results. Different from the research on adult/youth mentoring, mentoring in the workplace has well-documented benefits in two directions:

While helping a young adult establish a place in the adult world of work, an individual benefits from providing support and guidance. Through helping others, a mentor gains internal satisfaction, respect for his or her capabilities as a teacher and advisor, and reviews and reappraises the past by participating in a young adult's attempts to face the challenges of early career years (Kram, 1988).

These bi-directional, mutually beneficial relationships benefit the individuals involved in two ways: in their “career functions,” meaning everything related to their career trajectory, and in their “psychosocial functions,” such as increased self-confidence and sense of identity (Kram, 1988). These benefits echo the desired employee skills discussed earlier. They also relate to the benefits for youth outlined above. Whether in the workforce or in an educational or extra-curricular context, mentors can help their mentees on a more technical level of navigating the nuances of school or the workplace, as well as on a more affective level, helping to promote self-esteem, psychological safety, and the space to grow, learn, and fulfill one's potential.

As discussed earlier, there is a dearth of both programs and research centered on mentoring older youth. Recent findings from the field of neuroscience lend support to the importance of focusing on this population. According to Laurence Steinberg's new book *Age of Opportunity: Lessons*

*from the New Science of Adolescence*, adolescence should be defined as the 15-year period beginning at age ten and lasting until age 25. Contrary to earlier beliefs that the years prior to age ten were the most important in terms of brain development, new findings show that the brain is tremendously malleable and open to growth during adolescence, more so than during any time before or after (Steinberg, 2014). This means that there are significant implications for those who would seek to foster this growth in positive ways, as well as for a society that by and large doesn't invest a lot in those at the upper end of adolescence who are not on the college and career track. As Steinberg explains:

... the brain's malleability makes adolescence a period of tremendous opportunity—and great risk. If we expose our young people to positive, supportive environments, they will flourish. But if the environments are toxic, they will suffer in powerful and enduring ways (Steinberg, 2014, p. 9).

One of the best tools for creating these positive and supportive environments is through mentoring. According to the president of the California Mentor Foundation, Dr. Andrew Mecca, "Mentoring is the most potent youth development asset we have to address the needs of the 15 million young people who woke up today without a caring adult in their lives" (Mecca, 2011, p. 34). The risk of adolescence is that human beings in this stage of development are prone to poor decision-making, sometimes with tragic results, and exacerbated by being in the presence of peers (Steinberg, 2014). Mentoring relationships mitigate these risks by providing the guidance, advice, and example of an older person who can help the mentee make better decisions.

Mentoring is uniquely powerful as an educational tool because it helps young people develop their “soft” or “non-cognitive” skills and attends to their growth as human beings (Grossman & Tierney, 1998; Kram, 1988; Mecca, 2011; Rhodes, 2002). In my own work over my twenty plus year career, I continue to be amazed at the power and simplicity of a mentoring relationship in which the mentor cares about and listens to the young person and expresses a belief in their potential. The impact of these very simple things can be tremendous and life changing. At its essence, whether it takes place in schools, the workplace, or after-school programs, mentoring is about just that: caring, listening, and believing. Furthermore, unlike many other educational initiatives and strategies, because of its heavy emphasis on the relationship between the mentor and the mentee, it involves attending to the holistic needs of the young person being mentored. Drawing on resiliency research about youth from disadvantaged neighborhoods and families in Philadelphia, youth need to be “given a fair chance (1) to acquire the cognitive skills and resources to become educated to their highest potential; (2) to accumulate psychological and social skills that foster positive identity, including a personal sense of well-being and self-efficacy; and (3) to participate in activities that foster a capacity to perform as family members, workers, and informed citizens in their communities” (Frank F. Furstenberg, Cook, Eccles, Glen H. Elder, & Sameroff, 1999, pp. 9-10). Mentoring is unique in its ability to create opportunities for growth in all of these areas in a way that traditional schooling, as it is currently structured, typically does not.

Many mentoring programs grew out of a problem-solving mindset,



rather than a youth development, asset-based framework (Sedonaen & Bliss, 2002). To help youth in the transition to adulthood, their holistic needs must be addressed. The most transformational and effective mentoring programs have a youth development lens, including a commitment to youth engagement, the basic premise of which is that “because young people are best able to articulate what they need from the organizations and institutions that reach them, communities and organizations that involve youth as decision makers are more effective at capturing the interest and meeting the needs of young people” (Sedonaen & Bliss, 2002, p. 51). Particularly with youth who are out of school and disengaged, the ability to capture their interest and engage them is critical. The highly personalized and relational process of mentoring is particularly able to reach and work with young people in this way.

Another key ingredient to successful mentoring can be found in research about the power of expectations, particularly on the part of others. In the mentoring described above, the personal interaction involved in one-on-one mentoring relationships typically fosters an increased level of belief on the part of the mentor and mentee in the potential of the mentee. The impact that one’s own expectations and the expectations of others have on performance and achievement is significant and has been demonstrated in many different contexts. A striking example of this comes from a story captured on public radio about the relationship between blindness and expectations, and how the expectations of other people about what blind people are capable of predicts what they do—to the extent that blind people

can literally learn to see based on these expectations (Glass, Spiegel, & Miller, 2015). In the same segment, the broadcasters do an experiment bringing rats into the NPR studio and giving one group of people a set of rats that have been described as extra intelligent and special and another group of people a set of rats that have been described as the opposite. The rats that people thought were intelligent performed differently and at a higher level because of the expectations of the people interacting with them (Glass, Spiegel, & Miller, 2015). The example of the rats shows how we physically communicate our expectations in a way that even animals can pick up on and respond to. Even unconsciously, we transmit expectations to others that are then internalized. Young people are particularly susceptible to living up to—or down to—the expectations of the adults around them, emphasizing how important even unspoken expectations are.

A psychologist named Ellen Langer conducted experiments on mentally altering the effects of aging, including one where she immersed a group of elderly men in an environment where every cue and artifact was true to 1959 and envisioning their younger selves, 22 years in the past, for five days, and the participants were physiologically impacted through this shift in mindset (Grierson, 2014). Much of Langer's work involves health and illness, seemingly physical states like blindness. If people can alter their physical health and physical states such as the ability to see or walk without a cane by changing their thinking, they can certainly alter things like their education and performance on mental tasks. This is the basis of much of the work of Carol Dweck (also quoted in the NPR story), who has analyzed the relationship

between two different types of mindsets—fixed versus growth—and their impact on achievement (Dweck, 2006). According to Dweck, if people believe that they can grow and change with effort, versus that they are either born smart or not, it changes how they react to failure—and ultimately impacts their success (Dweck, 2006). If mentoring can influence a young person’s belief in themselves and their abilities, it can also make a difference in their outcomes.

The potential benefits of mentoring are numerous and far-reaching, affecting the educational achievement, professional skills, psychological well-being, and life outcomes of those being mentored.

### Theory of Action

Based on this review of knowledge for action and my experiences in the early days of my residency, my strategic project was built around the following theory of action:

If I...

- cultivate mentoring relationships based on caring, deep listening, high expectations and trust, and
- focus on students’ dreams and passions,

Then...

- students will rediscover/connect with their passions and educational and career goals,
- build their job readiness and soft skills, and
- get back on college and career pathways.

Mentoring can bridge the divide between disengaged, out-of-school youth and viable educational and career pathways, and in a personalized way can also help to better meet the needs of employers. The McKinsey Global Institute sums up the need—and solution—that I’ve focused on in this capstone:

In many advanced economies, post-secondary education will need to be redesigned to create a competency-based, personalized, lifelong learning model—one that can evolve quickly to meet rapidly changing

employer needs. This effort should focus on improving the productivity of university and vocational training and better aligning curricula with employer needs (Manyika, Lund, August, & Ramas, 2012, p. 13).

There is a desperate and growing need for solutions to the education/workforce mismatch, as well as for new models of higher education that focus on this issue. In all of these areas, an approach that is personalized and tailored to the needs of young people is critical. Mentoring is an effective way of providing this personalization. It behooves us as educators, employers, community members, and policymakers to collaborate at all levels (K-12, post-secondary institutions, industry, communities) to forge better pathways from youth to adulthood, from school to careers, and come up with such personalized and integrated solutions.

## **Strategic Project**

### ***Description***

I was fortunate to have the Ed.L.D. program's support to build a residency around my Innovation College Network idea, as well as to have the support of two different host organizations. After starting my residency at a different site, after a month I found a second residency site with the Mills College School of Education in Oakland, California. Fortunately for my strategic project and capstone, my work to launch a pilot of the Innovation College Network was consistent throughout both residency experiences. The fit was much stronger at Mills and my work on the Innovation College Network there dovetailed nicely with my other project of supporting the Center for Urban Schools and Partnerships, an initiative designed to engage Mills College more fully in the Oakland schools and broader community.

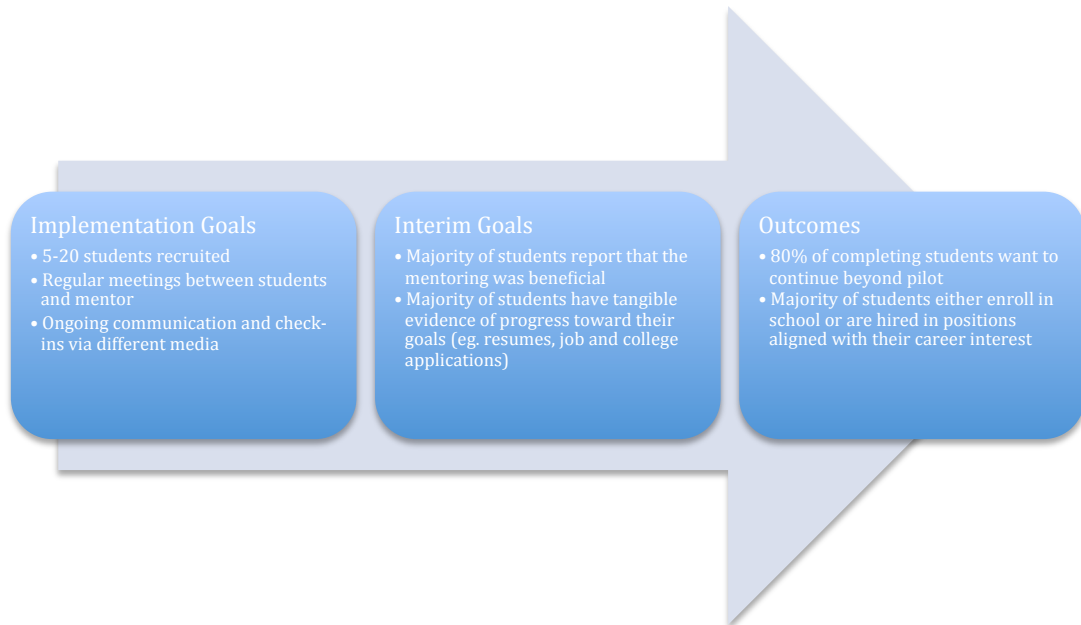
My strategic project was centered around the work of launching a pilot of the Innovation College Network model. Initially, I thought that I would be able to identify the young people and place them in jobs very quickly and then focus on working with them and their employers and study that process for my capstone. Within the first three months, a couple of salient observations emerged: the first was that the process of matching students with apprenticeships would not be quick and easy, particularly in this start-up phase of ICN, and the second is that there is a lot that goes into the advising/mentoring relationship that is worthy of examination. For these reasons, while still continuing the other work involved in launching the

Innovation College Network, I simultaneously honed in on the practice of mentoring as the focus of the capstone.

The intent was to identify and work with 5-20 students between the ages of 16 and 26, including both those who have not completed high school and those who have. Consistent with the goals and target population of the Innovation College Network, all of the pilot students were to share the life circumstance of being off meaningful college and/or career pathways. The main activities of the strategic project included one-on-one mentoring of students (including developing resumes and cover letters, identifying good career choices and potential employers), and outreach, recruitment, and communication with employers, where applicable. The goal, writ broadly, was to help out-of-school youth move toward higher education and employment options, and to examine the particulars of the mentoring relationship that helped make this movement.

The goals for my project were based on my aforementioned theory of action: If I cultivate mentoring relationships based on caring, deep listening, and trust, and focus on students' dreams and passions, then students will rediscover/connect with their passions and career goals, build their job readiness and soft skills, and get back on college and career pathways. The following logic model articulates the goals and performance measurement system for the pilot.

*Figure 2: Innovation College Network Pilot Logic Model*



In July of 2014, I began the process of identifying interested young people and meeting with them to begin a mentoring relationship. Although there was some interest from youth that I didn't know personally, the only people I actually met and worked with were all former students of mine. These pre-existing relationships—and knowing that so many of my former students were no longer in or had never attended college—were a major reason for my wanting to build this new organization in Oakland. In trying to pilot a program with no track record and nothing concrete to offer students yet (such as credits or existing internships), it made sense to me that the outreach would be easier in a community where I had pre-existing relationships with dozens of young people who fit my target population. Although a few other people in my network introduced me to potential students, I was uneasy about the value proposition that I was offering, since I

was not yet able to provide either academic credit or employment, and I was reluctant to engage people that I didn't know in this process. Looking backward, I believe that had I included young people whom I hadn't known previously I would have learned more in this process as I now feel that there is more value in the mentoring alone than I had previously believed. The fact that in the end I only worked with people with whom I had a pre-existing relationship certainly doesn't negate my results, but it did lead me to a new set of questions that I addressed in conversations with some of my students and which I'll discuss more in the analysis section. Given the time constraints of the residency and capstone, it was helpful to be able to begin right away without first having to create a recruitment strategy and process—something that could have been the topic of a capstone in and of itself and a challenge that was actually identified as a major obstacle by some of the other higher education start-ups that I researched.

On July 15<sup>th</sup>, I posted the following onto my Facebook page:

Hey former Oakland students of mine-- I'm starting a new organization that's goal is to better connect employment, job training, and education. The goal is to help students get on college and career pathways, regardless of whether or not they have a high school diploma (and at no cost, other than as part of the job). If you're looking for help getting a job, finding a career, or getting back in school, send me a message and let's talk. I'm looking for a group of students willing to work with me to get this started. I get to learn what you need and you get help with employment and education. And of course, I also get to reconnect with some of my many adopted children from the last 14 years! (-:

Largely through this post, which I then reposted again in October, I identified nine young people, aged 18-30, with whom I began meeting (See Figure 3: Pilot Students (in order of enrollment)). All of them were former students of mine at one of the two Oakland high schools I started and led: ARISE High



School and Life Academy of Health and Bioscience. I followed up with everyone who responded to me through Facebook although there were a few who were interested who were not living in the Bay Area that I told I hoped to be able to work with sometime in the future. Of the nine in my pilot, six had responded via Facebook, and the other three I had either run into or been in touch with offline. One other former student who lives in the area had responded to me on Facebook but we were never able to meet.

*Figure 3: Pilot Students (in order of enrollment)*

<i>Name<sup>1</sup></i>	<i>Age at start</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Educational Status at start of pilot<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>Employment Status at start of pilot</i>	<i>Career Interests</i>
Maléna	20	Latina	High school diploma; some community college	None	Ultrasound Technology
Jaime	19	Latino	High school certificate of completion/IEP diploma; previously enrolled at Heald College	Part-time security and construction at first; some design projects	Photography, design, music
Javier	30	Latino	High school diploma	Employee and owner at a bakery co-operative	Baking, business, entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship
Tania	21	Latina	High school diploma; 2.5 years at California State University	None at first; then working in an after-school program	Working with youth, mental health, counseling
Veronica	20	Latina	High school diploma; 2 years at Mt. Holyoke	None	Working with prisoners and/or formerly incarcerated youth
Dulcé	18	Latina	High school diploma	Working in after-school program in her former high school	Working with youth
Ja'Nelle	22	African-American & Pacific Islander	Some high school	Labor-staffing organization	Unsure; goal is to earn high school diploma
Malia	27	Pacific	High school	Clerical position in	Working with youth;

<sup>1</sup> The names of the participants have been changed.

<sup>2</sup> None of the students were enrolled in an educational institution at the time of entering the

<sup>2</sup> None of the students were enrolled in an educational institution at the time of entering the pilot.

		Islander	diploma; some community college	shipping company	possibly within the health field
Flora	19	Latina	High school diploma; 1.5 years at UC Davis	At-home child care worker/nanny	Unsure but enjoys working with children and interested in art and music

As I started meeting with the youth, I also met with numerous employers, funders, city officials, community leaders, investors, entrepreneurs, and educators to discuss the Innovation College Network, potential positions for my students, and ideas for collaboration (see Appendix B: Innovation College Network/Strategic Project-Related Meetings for a list of these meetings). For the purposes of this capstone, discussion will be limited to those meetings that were directly related to the mentoring relationships and the pilot.

The focus of the mentoring, as articulated in my theory of action, was on listening to the experiences and aspirations of the young people and trying to support them from there. To elicit their thoughts, in our initial meetings I asked variations of the following questions:

- Why did you respond to my Facebook message?
- What are your goals and hopes for your future?
- Would you like to earn a degree?
- If you could pursue a career in any field, what would you choose?
- What would your dream job be?

After recruiting the last few students, I asked them what they hoped to gain from their relationship and conversations with me. I looped back with the earlier students to ask them about their goals for our mentoring relationship as well.

The format of these mentoring relationships included in-person meetings, at least initially, as well as phone calls and text and Facebook

messages. The in-person meetings were initially one-on-one conversations with subsequent meetings that included working together on applications, job searches, portfolios, etc., as well as meetings with others, such as college representatives and individuals from particular industries of interest to the student. The mentoring relationship was different with each student, although I met with each young person at least once in person and had at least a few virtual exchanges as well. However, even in these meetings and conversations, the topics and activities varied. The one constant was my focus on what the student's goals were and how I could help them as they worked toward meeting them. A general list of the activities per student is below:

*Figure 4: Major Activities by Student*

Name	Major Activities
Maléna	5 in-person meetings Discussions of goals and aspirations Numerous virtual conversations Support with resume, job applications, college applications
Jaime	7 in-person meetings Discussions of goals and aspirations Numerous virtual conversations Support with resume, job applications, portfolio
Javier	1 in-person meeting Discussions of goals and aspirations 1 phone meeting Numerous text and email exchanges
Tania	2 in-person meetings Discussions of goals and aspirations Numerous virtual conversations
Veronica	4 in-person meetings Numerous virtual conversations
Dulcé	1 in-person meeting Discussions of goals and aspirations Several virtual conversations
Ja'Nelle	1 in-person meeting

	Discussions of goals and aspirations Numerous virtual conversations	
Malia	2 in-person meetings Discussions of goals and aspirations Follow-up exchanges Help with resume	
Flora	2 in-person meetings Discussions of goals and aspirations Several virtual conversations	One activ ity that I

introduced into my mentoring late in the residency was inspired by my use of a framework from my Authentic Leadership Development class at Harvard Business School (further described in the

All of the students had some activity to report in terms of working toward achieving their goals. However, only three of the nine were reenrolled in school by the end of the pilot, highlighting the distance between efforts to reengage in school and career pathways and successfully doing so. Taking these initial steps is important, but it is often not enough to overcome the many barriers to continuing education and employment. Mentoring alone, without being connected to concrete educational and career opportunities, might not be sufficient. It's not hard to imagine, however, that were the path clear for all nine students, that first step encouraged through mentoring could make all the difference in their trajectory. For example, if meetings with me provided academic credit and led to paid internships, I believe that the mentoring in conjunction with these opportunities would have yielded the result of all nine students engaging more fully with me and earning credit.

Javier, one of the students I met with least often and who does not have any tangible results attributed to my mentoring, articulated the potential of the mentoring relationship connected with educational and career

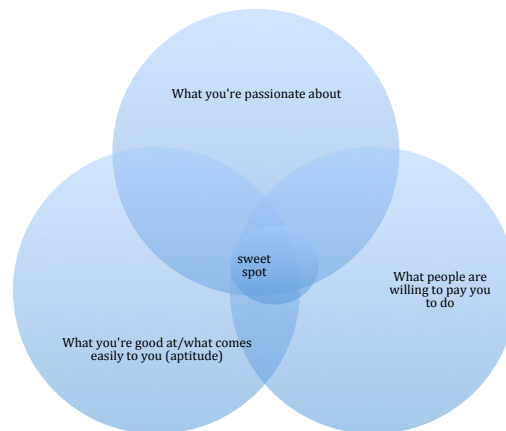
opportunities. In an email, he wrote that talking with me has helped him “greatly” and that he didn’t know that there were colleges that gave credit for work experiences. Javier is very excited about the broader idea of the Innovation College Network because it would give him “credit for time spent nurturing a career” which he has spent a lot of time doing (more than anyone else in the pilot.) Again, though, even without the ideal ICN program, the first steps are important. Javier writes:

Opening my own place has always been a goal of mine and Laura’s enthusiastic energy is contagious and she’s always willing to help. Talking with her has forced me to take a minute from my busy life and think of what I’m going to do with both my career and education.

Before meeting with me, the students were for the most part not engaged in conversations about their futures nor were they taking even these preliminary steps toward furthering their educational and career goals. Thinking and talking about their futures, as well as taking the initiative to begin moving toward their goals, are critical precursors to achieving these goals. However, in order for this particular mentoring project to be successful, bridges to connect students’ initiative to outcomes need to be created.

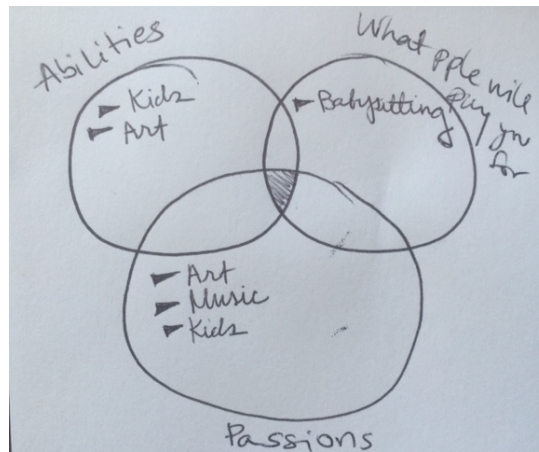
*Analysis* section of this paper). Authentic Leadership Development Professor Scott Snook urged his students to find their “sweet spot,” the intersection between the things that you’re naturally good at doing, the things that people are willing to pay you to do, and your passions (see Figure 5: Sweet Spot Venn Diagram.)

*Figure 5: Sweet Spot Venn Diagram*



In conversations with Flora, one of my students, she communicated that she was reluctant to return to school without knowing what she wanted to do professionally and therefore what the purpose was for returning. I thought that she would benefit from doing the Authentic Leadership Development exercise to help clarify and discover her “sweet spot” and I therefore had her create one during our second meeting (see Figure 6: Flora's Sweet Spot Venn Diagram below.)

*Figure 6: Flora's Sweet Spot Venn Diagram*



As Flora thought about the categories, her enjoyment of the childcare work that she was doing made sense. We also talked about how the category of what people will pay you to do is limited without a college degree. When she was attending U.C. Davis, she said that there were too many prerequisites and skills that she was supposed to have already developed prior to college to enroll as an art or music major and she ended up taking courses that she wasn't really interested in just because she didn't have a clear direction or purpose as a college student. In our conversations, including discussing the idea of returning and completing her degree, we talked a lot about using her education to pursue her interests and passions and develop skills that would enable her to find her "sweet spot" after graduating.

The process of the mentoring in this pilot was somewhat unique as compared to what is typically found in both the field and the literature. As was communicated through my Facebook post, there was a bi-directionality to our conversations and mentoring relationships. I was both offering help and asking for assistance, setting up what I hoped would be a win-win scenario that benefited the "mentee" and the "mentor" equally. The students would get

help pursuing their educational and career goals, and I would learn what they needed to get back on college and career pathways.

An early example of this bi-directionality was demonstrated in my initial conversation with Javier, my oldest student, who had been on the design team for my first high school. He spoke of how powerful that experience was for him and how excited he was at the prospect of not only finding a higher education pathway and solution for himself, but also of helping to build another new school that would benefit others as well. As the oldest young person in my pilot, he also looked forward to meeting with the other, younger students in the pilot and possibly serving as a mentor himself in the process. The potential that he saw was really multi-directional, in that he could benefit personally from working with me, help me in my project, and ultimately help others in his community as well.

All of the students were very aware of the fact that we were pioneering something together and that while I was offering them my expertise along the way, I was also a learner in the process alongside them. This co-learning mentoring process included what I was trying to do to launch ICN as well as the areas that I was exploring along with my mentees. For example, because of Maléna's interest in becoming an ultrasound technician, we researched entry-level positions in health care where a credential or degree wasn't necessary. I also spoke with someone at Oakland's Children's Hospital on her behalf to learn about opportunities and programs there. Jaime and I went to visit several different arts-related organizations together and I also attended a networking event and panel focused on digital design on his behalf.



Even in our more typical mentoring sessions where I would check in on their goals and progress toward them, my approach had more of an inquiry lens to it than many mentoring relationships, meaning that it was based on my posing questions and encouraging the youth to come up with their own answers. The sessions that were probably the closest to a standard mentoring model were when I assisted the students with completing their college applications and resumes, two fairly straightforward activities in which the relationship was more one-dimensional and I was the expert and mentor helping the young person.

## **Results**

Revisiting my theory of action as a tool for assessing my results to date, there is a direct relationship between the “if” statements (my input and implementation of my theory of action) and my successes (the “then” statements.) There are a wide variety of experiences and results amongst the nine students with whom I worked. They came to me from many different starting points and engaged with me at different levels as well. While I had known all nine students prior to this project, there was also a range of pre-existing relationships including students I had worked with as an advisor and teacher and those I had only known peripherally as their principal. Taken as a whole, my results are as diverse as the students. Before describing the results student by student, the chart below assesses my overall results according to my theory of action<sup>3</sup>.

*Figure 7: Theory of Action Status*

<b>Theory of action “if” statements...</b>	<b>Major results</b>
<b><i>Cultivate mentoring relationships based on caring, deep listening, high expectations, and trust</i></b>	Established mentoring relationships with 9 students and created the space for them to share their hopes and challenges
<b><i>Focus on students’ dreams and passions</i></b>	Mentoring conversations with 9 students focused on eliciting students’ goals and interests
<b>Theory of action “then” statements...</b>	
<b><i>Students will rediscover/connect with their passions and educational and career goals</i></b>	All 9 students articulating their goals 9 students taking steps in the direction of these articulated goals (as evidenced by artifacts such as college and job applications and resumes)

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<sup>3</sup> Thanks to Ed.L.D. Cohort 2 colleague Christine DeLeon for sharing her capstone and the idea of this chart.

<b><i>Build their job readiness and soft skills</i></b>	9 of the 9 demonstrating some evidence of this as demonstrated by college interviews, meetings with industry professionals, resume and portfolio development, college and job applications, enrollment in school, and the communication skills and perseverance required to complete all of the above
<b><i>Get back on college and career pathways</i></b>	In progress but it's too early to tell if these outcomes will be met for most of the students. 3 of the 9 are currently reenrolled in school.

My evidence for this section is drawn from my observations of my students, their written and oral responses in my exchanges with them, the artifacts from their work with me, and the project assessment questions that I asked them. For example, a few months in when I asked my first two students their perspective on how the mentoring was going for them, I received the following responses:

*Laura: What has this done for you? How have I helped you or not?*

*Maléna: Just because you are so motivating; you have all these resources that we wouldn't find ourselves, all these connections, I feel like it's just helpful, and you start to realize you actually can do it, there are programs, there are people out there who want to help you like you. You still have a chance to do what you want; there is still a chance for you to do what you want. Whatever career, whatever you want to do. It's not too late, even though you've wasted time, there's still time.... At 30 I already want to be an ultrasound technologist.*

Someone telling me it's not too late, someone who believes in you when you don't believe in yourself. Always finding resources, reaching out to people, checking in, making sure that school is part of your future.

*Laura: Are you sorry you responded to me on FB?*

*Jaime: I don't feel sorry, I think it just takes time, I have to be patient, nothing just comes to you, hopefully someday it will turn into something good.*

When asked, Jaime said that the only other person he's spoken with about his goals is his girlfriend.

*Laura: What enabled you to trust me?*

Jaime: I've known you for a while and you've known my bad side, and I think you can give me that extra push that I need. I really do want to go back to school but I have this debt facing me.

As Jaime made clear, in the case of the low-income, would-be first-generation college students in my pilot, there is often no adult in their lives with whom they discuss educational and career goals. For this reason, just responding to my initial outreach efforts and having these conversations with me is a step towards getting back on a college and career pathway. For Ja'Nelle, this was a big step, which she articulated when she first responded to my post:

Hello Ms.Laura. I just seen your post and I desperately need help getting some type of diploma/GED but going to school while working two jobs is kinda hard to balance but if it takes leaving one of my jobs I am willing to do so! My grandmother passed away on May 1,2014 I feel that I owe it to her, myself & my daughter to get and or finish the things I will need in life

A few days later, Ja'Nelle's post on her Facebook page highlighted the importance of having an adult with whom she can discuss her future:

Happy Friday loves!!!! Today I have a meeting with my favorite principle in the world [Laura](#).Even in high school when I was ready to give up she still believed in me.I'm so nervous but school is a must & in ready to rake it on again

—  feeling ready for my papers.

These are early indicators that point to the potential of these mentoring relationships, if not more tangible results.

Looking at the original logic model for my strategic project (see Figure 2: Innovation College Network Pilot Logic Model) is another way to consider my results (see Figure 8: Logic Model Assessment below.)

*Figure 8: Logic Model Assessment*

	<b>Goal/Outcome</b>	<b>Status</b>
Implementation Goals	5-20 students recruited	9 recruited
	Regular meetings between students and mentor	Met with 4 of the 9 on a regular basis (in-person and by phone)
	Ongoing communication and check-ins via different media	Attempted with all 9 on my end; succeeded to some extent with all 9 but much more frequently with 4 of the 9
Interim Goals	Majority of students report that mentoring was beneficial	8 of 8 who responded
	Majority of students have tangible evidence of progress towards their goals (e.g. Resumes, job and college applications, outreach, and enrollment)	9 have some evidence of working towards their goals
Outcomes	80% of completing students want to continue beyond pilot	N/A
	Majority of students either enrolled in school or are hired in positions aligned with their career interests	3 reenrolled in school, but too early to tell with the others

More specifically, below is a description of the activities and results to date by student.

*Figure 9: Activities and Outcomes by Student*

Name	Results	Current Education & Employment Status
Maléna	Resume completed and revised Job applications submitted College application (Minerva) submitted Other college applications in progress Employed at Target Tried reenrolling in community college in January but couldn't resolve financial hold issue	Target Fitting Room Attendant

Jaime	Resume completed and revised 2 meetings with 3 professional artists and tours of two different artist work spaces Portfolio assembled Job applications submitted Continuing to apply for jobs and pursue his own artistic ventures	Some design projects and performing as a musician
Javier	Meeting about opening a café/bakery for-profit in conjunction with ICN	Employee and owner at a bakery co-operative
Tania	2 meetings with Mills College admissions officers Reenrolled in school	Enrolled in community college this semester and completing GE requirements to transfer back to a four-year college in 2016
Veronica	Reenrolled at Mount Holyoke	Reenrolled at Mount Holyoke
Dulcé	Appointment to visit Mills and meet with Admissions staff	Working in after-school program in her former high school
Ja’Nelle	Enrolled in a high school credit recovery program	Labor-staffing organization
Malia	Resume completed and revised Working on the Common App Appointment to meet with Mills Admissions staff Applied for new job	Clerical position in shipping company
Flora	Re-accessed Common App (from high school) and looked at transfer deadlines	At-home child care worker/nanny

All of the students had some activity to report in terms of working toward achieving their goals. However, only three of the nine were reenrolled in school by the end of the pilot, highlighting the distance between efforts to reengage in school and career pathways and successfully doing so. Taking these initial steps is important, but it is often not enough to overcome the many barriers to continuing education and employment. Mentoring alone, without being connected to concrete educational and career opportunities, might not be sufficient. It’s not hard to imagine, however, that were the path clear for all nine students, that first step encouraged through mentoring could

make all the difference in their trajectory. For example, if meetings with me provided academic credit and led to paid internships, I believe that the mentoring in conjunction with these opportunities would have yielded the result of all nine students engaging more fully with me and earning credit.

Javier, one of the students I met with least often and who does not have any tangible results attributed to my mentoring, articulated the potential of the mentoring relationship connected with educational and career opportunities. In an email, he wrote that talking with me has helped him “greatly” and that he didn’t know that there were colleges that gave credit for work experiences. Javier is very excited about the broader idea of the Innovation College Network because it would give him “credit for time spent nurturing a career” which he has spent a lot of time doing (more than anyone else in the pilot.) Again, though, even without the ideal ICN program, the first steps are important. Javier writes:

Opening my own place has always been a goal of mine and Laura’s enthusiastic energy is contagious and she’s always willing to help. Talking with her has forced me to take a minute from my busy life and think of what I’m going to do with both my career and education.

Before meeting with me, the students were for the most part not engaged in conversations about their futures nor were they taking even these preliminary steps toward furthering their educational and career goals. Thinking and talking about their futures, as well as taking the initiative to begin moving toward their goals, are critical precursors to achieving these goals. However, in order for this particular mentoring project to be successful, bridges to connect students’ initiative to outcomes need to be created.

## ***Analysis***

As a sector, education is often too narrowly focused on one small segment of who people are as human beings. One of the most influential courses and concepts that I was exposed to during my tenure at Harvard was Authentic Leadership Development (ALD). While focused on leadership, the concepts embedded in the ALD framework can be applied more generally to considering what makes someone a fulfilled and authentic person. The framework can be used as a holistic lens on all aspects of one's life. Indeed, the basic premise is that you are only an authentic leader when you are in balance and the different areas of your life and leadership are aligned. As explained in *True North: Discover Your Authentic Leadership*, a leader can only find his or her "true north," or purpose, when they can answer the following questions:

- *Self-Awareness*: What is my story? What are my strengths and developmental needs?
- *Values*: What are my most deeply held values? What principles guide my leadership?
- *Motivations*: What motivates me? How do I balance external and internal motivations?
- *Support Team*: Who are the people I can count on to guide and support me along the way?
- *Integrated Life*: How can I integrate all aspects of my life and find fulfillment? (George, 2007, p. 66)

The ALD framework is a useful tool in analyzing the results of my strategic project because although I did not set out to apply the framework to my mentoring at the onset, to a large extent I believe I did anyway.

### **ALD and Mentoring**



In considering mentoring through the lens of ALD, self-awareness is an essential goal that might be a pre-condition for growth. Self-awareness is also an essential building block in clarifying the other ALD components, and values and motivations in particular. When I consider the learning and development of infants, as well as later education, building self-awareness is critical for learning other skills. Learning to speak and communicate occurs in relation to others; learning to walk bridges the awareness and control of one's own body with the surrounding world. Moving forward, all new skills—reading, writing, dancing, sports, languages—have the individual who is doing the learning as the constant. All learning that occurs is in relation to the learner as he or she connects to other people, new skills, ideas, and knowledge. The learner, or self, is the constant, and therefore building self-awareness along the learning journey is important. In my mentoring pilot, my students came to me with varying levels of self-awareness and the mentoring activities and relationships all included efforts to build self-awareness. Where students both started and ended in terms of their self-awareness and other ALD attributes had an impact on the results.

It is hard to clarify one's values and motivations without having some self-awareness. However, asking people to think about their values and motivations is another way of helping to build self-awareness. Much of my mentoring focused on asking students what they wanted out of their lives, what was important to them, what they enjoyed doing, and what their goals were. All of these questions help students to think about their values and motivations, while also building self-awareness. The reverse sequence also

worked; some of the questions I posed directly addressed self-awareness and led to clarifying values and motivations. For example, I asked my students, particularly those who had a lower sense of self-awareness, to think about subjects or activities that they enjoyed in school to help them to identify career interests and goals.

Although by virtue of the fact that I added to the students' support teams by mentoring them, I didn't explicitly help students to think about this. In the course of our conversations, however, the importance of having a support team came up, as when Jaime mentioned his girlfriend and Tania her mentor from a scholarship program. One value of mentoring is that it is a way of adding to a person's support team, the lack of which is one of the reasons why some young people flounder.

Another benefit of mentoring is that it helps people to integrate their lives. Mentoring doesn't stay neatly in any particular segment of a life; if a young person suffered a personal tragedy or experienced an academic success, it will come up in the context of the mentoring relationship. Mentoring is focused on helping an individual to grow and that includes attending to all aspects of his or her life.

### *ALD and the Pilot Students*

At the start of the pilot, all nine students had in common that they were not enrolled in school and had not completed a college degree. To varying degrees and for different reasons, at that point in time, school was not a viable option for them. For the most part, secondary and post-secondary education is not explicitly geared toward helping students to answer the ALD

questions posed above. Rather, it is about students fitting into an existing structure and meeting requirements that are dictated by the institutions. This is true with many workforce development organizations as well, where young people are trained for particular careers with the needs of the employers dictating the educational program. My hypothesis is that whatever successes I saw in my project were due to this different orientation based on inquiry and getting at the holistic aspirations, thoughts, and needs of each young person.

To further analyze my results and test my hypothesis, reconsidering the nine students and my relationships with them through the ALD lens is helpful (see Figure 10: Previous Relationship, Perceptions, and Goals by Student below). It also helps to analyze my original theory of action:

If I...

- cultivate mentoring relationships based on caring, deep listening, high expectations, and trust, and
- focus on students' dreams and passions,

Then...

- students will rediscover/connect with their passions and educational and career goals,
- build their job readiness and soft skills, and
- get back on college and career pathways.

However inadvertently, ALD concepts were built into my theory of action, and therefore applying questions from the framework can help to illuminate why the project unfolded as it did: How did this project help the students to become more self-aware? Are they better able to articulate their values and motivations? Did I help them to further develop a support team, in addition to myself? And, most centrally to what I set out to do and the goals of the

Innovation College Network, are they further along toward integrating the various aspects of their life and finding fulfillment?

*Figure 10: Previous Relationship, Perceptions, and Goals by Student*

<i>Name</i>	<i>Previous relationship</i>	<i>Reasons for not being enrolled in school at start of pilot</i>	<i>Perceptions of benefits of mentoring</i>	<i>Goals as currently articulated in most recent mentoring session</i>
Maléna	Advisee, English student	Lack of motivation, bureaucratic issues at the community college, need for employment	Increased motivation, support, help with the process, someone who believes in you	To reenroll in school, attend school away from home, become an ultrasound technologist before the age of 30
Jaime	None beyond principal/student	Unrelated to interests, cost and previous debt, lack of motivation	Providing that “extra push” that he needs, being someone that he can talk to about his goals	To have a full-time music- or design-related job that he loves and wants to stay in for years; earn his degree in a way that has relevance for him (as ICN proposes)
Javier	Participated on the Life Academy design team	Unrelated to interests, lack of motivation	Forced to think about his future and goals; increased motivation	To open his own bakery and make money but also to ideally do it as a social enterprise and a way of helping others “with backgrounds like” his, help start a new college, earn degree if it can be done in an alternative way and aligned with his work, interests, and personal life as put forward in the ICN model
Tania	Student leadership advisee, English student	Left college and moved home to have a baby, bureaucratic issues with community college enrollment and course availability, childcare issues and finances	Conversations “re-assured” her that she was on the right track	Complete bachelor’s degree; work with youth and support their mental health possibly as a counselor
Veronica	English student, unofficial	Family issues and need to work and	Credits her being in college to my	Complete BA from Mt. Holyoke; work with prisoners and/or formerly incarcerated youth

	advisee	earn/save money for the family	mentoring and support; constant "pushing"	
Dulcé	None beyond principal/student	Had a baby while still in high school; need to balance work and earning an income with childcare and school		Complete BA degree
Ja'Nelle	None beyond principal/student	Lack of motivation, still short of completing adult school high school diploma requirements; barely making ends meet with three jobs and trying to support her daughter and family	Speaking with me helped her find a new credit recovery program	Complete high school diploma
Malia	None beyond principal/student	Need to work to support her younger brothers	Feels "motivated" because of my mentoring and recommitted to pursuing education	Find a new job; go back to college and earn degree; work with youth, possibly within the health field
Flora	Advisee, English student	Lost motivation; doesn't see the relevance of the degree; unsure what she needs/wants it for	Said that our conversations helped her to "reflect"	Complete degree at some point; work with children

Previously, in explaining the pilot, I described how the students were recruited and that I had known all nine prior to this project. However, as displayed in the chart above, I did not know each student equally well. It is also obvious that the depth of our earlier relationship didn't predict the depth of the mentoring relationship in the pilot. Two examples of relatively successful mentoring relationships illustrate this difference. Veronica, the student who is back at Mount Holyoke this semester, referred to our long-

standing relationship and how it helped her to attend Mount Holyoke in the first place, as well as to reenroll this semester. She said that initially, when she was still in high school, I “made her apply to all these colleges that she’d never heard about” and that my “availability” made a difference. She remembered when a group of students stayed over at my house to work on their college applications as well as other opportunities that I provided for them, and commented that I would always “reach out” to her and others. In terms of going back to school this spring, Veronica said that speaking with my husband and me was what made her decide to go back (he had been her teacher as well and was with me for one of our conversations). Even though at that point her family was also encouraging her to go back, according to Veronica, it didn’t carry as much weight: “I think you guys see more big picture...[my family] is like, yeah, you can go to school, but they don’t really see the outcome of it... they don’t see the other opportunities it can provide.” Because of the depth of our relationship, and the way that it is focused on the big picture of Veronica’s life and aspirations, I was able to have a significant impact on her trajectory.

On the other hand, Jaime, a student I did not know well back in high school, was the member of the pilot with whom I had the highest level of interaction and engagement. As I wrote earlier, he also still felt a relatively high level of trust for me just from knowing and interacting with me as his principal. Conversely, Tania and Flora were two students that I spent quite a bit of time with over the years. Both had babysat for my children on occasion and had traveled with me to various conferences and college tours. However,

in the pilot, they were two of the harder ones for me to meet with and even get to respond to my outreach efforts. The lack of predictability in terms of our pre-existing relationship indicates that previous relationships don't necessarily determine effective mentoring. Furthermore, it is possible that meaningful relationships that are based on the principles articulated here can be developed at any point, even when the mentor and mentee are new to each other. The important thing is for these relationships to be built around caring, deep listening, and trust and focused on students' dreams and passions.

Even where these relationships are in place from earlier, as in the case of Tania and Flora, or are newer, as in the case of Jaime, there is no guarantee that mentoring will yield results. The question of defining results is important, and as discussed earlier, particularly with youth who are out of school and disengaged, preliminary steps such as thinking about and defining goals are necessary. Ultimately, however, given the bigger societal and economic picture, reengagement in college and career pathways is still a critical end goal. Furthermore, people can achieve this goal even without mentoring. For example, although Tania is one of the two students reenrolled in school at the moment, I think that this is due to her having a stronger ALD base from the start, rather than because of my mentoring, although it is also possible that this base was stronger because she had another very strong mentoring relationship. In spite of being out of school when we first started meeting, Tania was extremely clear about her values and motivation, and had a pretty high level of self-awareness. She also had a fairly strong support team between her family, her mentor from a scholarship program that she is a

part of, and some others. As a new mother with educational and career goals still unfulfilled, she was struggling with finding an integrated life, but she was clear about what she wanted for her education, her career, and for her daughter.

On the other hand, Flora was not at all sure about what she wanted from her future in terms of her education, career, and life, and didn't have clarity in the ALD areas at the start of the pilot. I'm hoping that I have helped her along in the process of discovering these things, but at the moment, there is no real evidence that she is moving closer to re-engaging in school and career pathways. As I've hypothesized, building students' strength in the ALD areas is a valuable start toward other outcomes. Flora said that my mentoring helped her to "reflect"; in other words, our conversations helped her to examine herself and her priorities and possibly become more self-aware, a prerequisite for growth and movement.

The other framework from ALD that is helpful in thinking about this project I referred to earlier in my work with Flora (see Figure 5: Sweet Spot Venn Diagram.) Ultimately, this diagram serves as another tool for integrating the various aspects of your life and who you are as a person, which is again at the heart of what I was trying to do in my mentoring. The design of ICN was predicated on the idea that if you help disengaged, out of school youth discover their passions and connect their interests to education and career pathways, you can successfully reengage them in school and the workforce. It is basically a process of helping them find their "sweet spots." In the pilot



through the mentoring process, even before I explicitly used the diagram as a tool, I was essentially trying to do exactly this in each one-on-one relationship.

Regardless of the level of interaction and numbers of meetings and conversations with the students, in considering what happened, particularly through the ALD framework, I believe that the act of engagement in the pilot alone had some positive results that speak to the power of mentoring relationships. In looking at the collected evidence through the ALD lens, I am able to make some educated estimates of the change in the five areas for each student (see Figure 11: Estimated Change in ALD Area by Student).

*Figure 11: Estimated Change in ALD Area by Student*

<i>Name</i>	<i>Self-Awareness</i>	<i>Values</i>	<i>Motivation</i>	<i>Support Team</i>	<i>Integrated Life</i>
Maléna	Increased	Increased	Greatly Increased	Increased	Increased
Jaime	Increased	Increased	Increased	Increased	Increased
Javier	Slightly Increased	Increased	Increased	Increased	Slightly Increased
Tania	Slightly Increased	Slightly Increased	Slightly Increased	Increased	Slightly Increased
Veronica	Increased	Increased	Greatly Increased	Increased	Increased
Dulcé	No change	No change	Slightly Increased	Increased	Slightly Increased
Ja’Nelle	Slightly Increased	Slightly Increased	Slightly Increased	Increased	Slightly Increased
Malia	Greatly Increased	Greatly Increased	Greatly Increased	Increased	Increased
Flora	Increased	Increased	Slightly Increased	Increased	Slightly Increased

All nine students share two categories that were increased: motivation and support team. The latter is obvious; in interacting with me in this way, I was single-handedly increasing their support team by one. Motivation is more complex. A lack of motivation was one of the big reasons for students not being in school and five of the eight students who provided feedback on my

mentoring mentioned some variation of the word as a benefit. However, all nine students demonstrated some motivation merely by participating in the pilot, although that raises the question of the counterfactual. Without the invitation from me, would they have demonstrated any increased motivation in thinking about pursuing their educational and career goals? There is no way to know, and for these nine students there very well may have been another nine that did not respond to my offer. However, if initial steps are important, and the students feel that they are more motivated as a result of mentoring, then perhaps the invitation is an equally important preliminary step. In addition, however well these students knew me beforehand, they all did have some relationship with me to start. Everyone has something or someone that helps to motivate them and everyone has at least the potential of a support team. Creating room for young people to activate these two things may be almost as important as the mentoring activities themselves.

### *Assessing the Results*

Overall, I believe that my theory of action is sound, although I don't have enough strong evidence to support that the final two "then" statements were realized: building job readiness and soft skills and getting back on college and career pathways. However, I do believe—and the ALD framework supports—that rediscovering and connecting with one's passions and goals is an important first step that could lead to these results later. I also believe that this is best done through a mentoring relationship, which is very different from most of the relationships found in formal educational settings. Mentoring is typically situated in outside organizations, as opposed to schools, and it is

more relational and therefore more bi-directional than most teacher-student relationships. By its nature it is more holistic and more aligned with the ALD framework. At the heart of successful mentoring programs is the building of a caring and trusting relationship such as I describe in my theory of action (Rhodes, 2002). In schools, typically, what emphasis that might exist on building caring relationships between adults and youth is usually eclipsed by the demands of teaching and assessing skills and knowledge. Through this project, I have become increasingly convinced that building these relationships is a critical entry point for learning, development, and growth along the higher education and career development pathway, particularly when trying to reengage out-of-school youth.

While there are numerous early indicators of the success of this approach, I think that there are a number of reasons for the limitations of my success in this project, including the fact of no significant change in overall career or educational status for six of the nine. In the case of the students who showed the least progress and growth, I don't think that I was as successful in building the deep and trusting relationships that I put forth in my theory of action. Moving forward, there are ways in which I believe I might be able to do this more effectively which I will outline in the implications section.

It is also worthwhile to look at the three students who reenrolled in school over the course of the pilot. Compared to the six who did not, the three returning students had the most credits in the areas they were seeking to complete (Tania and Veronica had earned at least half of the credits they needed towards their college degrees and Ja'Nelle had the majority of her

high school requirements.) It makes sense that it would be easier to help students in this situation to reenroll, as compared with the others who had little to no previous credits. This reiterates the feedback I received from the students suggesting that were I able to offer credits and/or paid apprenticeships connected to the mentoring, the commitment on the part of the students would be greater, the relationships deeper, and the impact larger. For the majority of students that I seek to serve, helping students navigate the existing systems isn't sufficient in terms of the broader context where I hope to affect change, namely through the creation of a new system. Furthermore, with mentoring as a standalone activity, the same significant obstacles that students came in with are still intact: especially the pressures of the need to work and earn an income that make seeking further education—including mentoring in that direction—a challenge. Finding the time to meet was hard for many of my students, given the intense demands on their time and availability.

Related to the previous points, the obstacles to going back to school are more significant than even I realized and there is very little support available for older students to help them navigate the various systems. From application fees to accessing transcripts to applying for financial aid, there are many stumbling blocks even for those who are serious about resuming their education. Even my efforts only went so far when up against the seemingly insurmountable—and often inane—problems that my students faced, such as not being able to get back into the online enrollment system and not being able to deal with a financial hold because of not having an ID card from the

previous semester. The programs that are the most geared toward working adults are mostly online and again don't provide the kind of personal support that my students need. The average age of students at University Now, the higher education institution most geared toward working adults, is 37, significantly higher than the students in my pilot and target population (Laetsch, 2013). In trying to overcome some of these very real obstacles, increased motivation isn't enough in and of itself. Ja'Nelle is a great example of this. Although she is reenrolled in school at the moment, she is about to be evicted from her apartment and is now looking at leaving the state. What this will do to her educational status is now a complete unknown, but it would not be surprising if finding another high school program was deprioritized as she relocates and searches for housing, employment, and soon preschool for her child.

When I first began teaching, I was struck by how much of an impact I was able to have merely by taking the time to build relationships with my students and show them that I cared about their lives and who they were as individuals both within and beyond my classroom. It was simultaneously inspiring and tragic to me how simple it was to stand out as a teacher and make a difference in my students' lives in this way. It was inspiring because of how little is really involved in simply caring about a young person and tragic because there are not enough caring adults in the lives of far too many youth. Especially as a new teacher, I struggled in my role as a teacher of content knowledge and skills and was better and more effective in my ability to build relationships with my students, many of which have lasted to this day almost

twenty-five years later. A critical part of this relationship building was holding high expectations. If an educator takes the time to get to know their students as individuals, cares about them and their futures, sees their potential and expects a lot of them, great things can happen. With this project and pilot, it seems as if I have come around full circle to the belief that these elements are what are really most important in education, and that transformative education starts with meeting and understanding where young people are, listening to them, believing in them, and helping them to dream and then achieve their dreams. I believe that this is an incredibly important foundation, and yet it is still only a starting point for building other connections and opportunities. Especially with older, disengaged and out-of-school youth, discovering the ALD elements and finding motivation in particular is a critical initial step, but then there need to be pathways available for them to continue taking additional steps.

Malia, one of the two older Life Academy students, confirms this idea in speaking about the impact of her participation in my pilot. Incidentally, she was also one of the students with whom I met the least, making me question an earlier assumption that my impact was correlated with how often I met with and interacted with my students. Malia reflected that meeting with me was “very motivating” for her and that our conversations have inspired her to do research, recommit to going to college, and begin applying. She also observed that having been to a small high school she’s not used to “your typical big college where your teacher doesn’t know you...a lot of times I’m not motivated because I think about it and it’s scary.” When I first talked to her

about the idea behind the Innovation College Network, she became very excited because, as she said, when she thinks about college, “in the beginning I don’t see myself doing it without help...I might not always need it [help] but in the beginning, yes.” While finances are a major factor—she didn’t attend college initially because of her need to support her younger brothers—having support is critical for her as well. In her relationship with me she feels like she is getting that support. Thinking beyond herself as her classmate Javier did, Malia also expressed her strong desire for me to be successful in launching the Innovation College Network not only for herself but because “so many people need this.”

Malia’s example is another one that demonstrates early indicators of success, in terms of becoming more self-aware, articulating her goals, values, and motivations, building her support network by meeting with me and talking with friends and family, and working toward integrating her life. She is now actively seeking both a new position that is more aligned with her interests and goals, as well as applying to colleges.

Looking at the broader context for my pilot and even the process that led to my focusing more narrowly on mentoring, I did not anticipate just how challenging it would be to start a new college. While I learned a lot in this process and am confident in my theory of action, it would have been much easier to have worked with an existing organization that could have given students some of the additional benefits of credits and employment that I was hoping to be able to offer. Of course, there would have been drawbacks to that approach as well in terms of the freedom to design and determine my

mentoring program, but it's possible that the benefits would have outweighed the costs. Working with youth already participating in a workforce development program or enrolled in an institution of higher education would also have yielded different results and told a different story. In many ways, the model of the Innovation College Network fosters the "integration" of people's lives, a key ALD area, and therefore seeks to address the academic, personal, and economic needs of young people in a unified way. As an effort that took place outside of an existing organization, the pilot affected mostly the personal and internal aspects of the youth involved, without being closely connected to the academic or the economic.

My plan of working with employers and developing work-based mentoring relationships was also harder to launch than I expected. However, due to my research on work-based learning and mentoring, as well as what I learned from my mentees, I am more convinced than ever that there is tremendous potential in establishing these relationships in the workplace. As both the research and this pilot have shown, mentoring has the potential to be an effective strategy in working with youth, particularly disconnected ones. As I consider my nine students, I could only imagine how powerful the joint efforts of providing overall life-coaching and ALD-focused mentoring along with work-based mentoring would be.

Far too many out-of-school youth are not fulfilling their social, educational, professional, or economic potential, and this has both a personal cost to the individuals themselves as well as to our society at large. Mentoring is an educational tool that can address this issue in a holistic way by helping these



youth discover and articulate their values, motivations, self-awareness, and support team. They can integrate their lives, if the mentoring is embedded in viable educational and career pathways.

## **Implications for Self**

My greatest learnings from my project and capstone are very much connected to what I learned about my leadership while in the Ed.L.D. program, as well as the leadership goals that I set for myself as a result. Using Lisa Lahey and Robert Kegan's adult development framework, I sought to move from a "self-authoring" mindset to a "self-transforming" one (Kegan & Lahey, 2009). In my career prior to coming to Harvard, I was very much a doer, and while I involved other people in the process of starting schools and actualizing projects, my leadership orientation was still focused on coming up with my own vision, rallying other people to my cause, getting them to do what I wanted them to do, and making things happen. Some of the feedback that I received from my direct reports in particular indicated that they didn't feel as if I listened very well to their ideas and perspectives. My leadership goal in the first year of the Ed.L.D. program was thus to be a better listener and to be more open to the ideas of others and not as attached to my own ideas. My goal in the second year took this a step further and more deliberately toward the ideas embedded in the concept of a self-transforming mindset, which is to operate without boundaries and to fully take in the perspectives of others, and to open myself up more to the limitless possibilities that exist in the world and minds of others.

In my mentoring, as well as in my approach to developing ICN, I have tried to do all of these things. In my relationships with my students, I have worked to be a better listener and to meet each young person where they are rather than where I am or where I would like them to be. I have also tried to

be a co-learner with them, as I mentioned earlier, and I think that that has been a very powerful aspect of this process, helping to yield benefits for them as well as for myself as a leader. Being a leader who listens deeply to others and solicits their ideas and feedback will enable me to better support those with whom I work.

Practicing being less attached to outcomes and more open to a wider range of possibilities will also help me to be more of a fellow learner with both students and colleagues. Earlier, I described the impact that I believe this co-learning stance had on my students. This process has led me to think about more horizontal ways of being as an educational leader in general and the power of creating more open-ended, lateral student-teacher and leader-employee relationships. While my findings aren't conclusive at this point, I am increasingly convinced that building bi-directional relationships and taking a stance of exploring possibilities and outcomes together, rather than providing the answers, has tremendous potential as a strategy for transforming education. I am also more and more committed to the importance of putting both relationships and personalization at the heart of any educational strategy or venture in which I am involved. I am convinced that nothing is more important in fostering the growth and learning of young people.

Much of what I've just described echoes the ideas of Authentic Leadership Development. While used mostly by business leaders and in the context of the workplace, I think that there is tremendous power in using and improving my own authentic leadership as a way of helping young people to grow and develop their own authentic selves and reach their potential in this

way. Dividing young people—or anyone—into discrete compartments, such as their academic learning, is counterproductive. At every stage of life, and particularly in formal educational structures, people need to be considered as holistic entities. As a leader, I need to work toward integrating the various parts of myself and my life, and help young people to do the same.

Educational approaches that ignore the importance of this integration will never be as successful as they could be, and I am more committed than ever to playing a role in disseminating and acting on my belief in the importance of a holistic approach to education.

In terms of more specific next steps in my career trajectory, I am still hopeful that I will find a way to continue to develop the Innovation College Network and the mentoring at its core. I am currently in conversation with Gino Pastori-Ng, co-founder and co-leader of the Youth Impact Hub, about seeking accreditation for their new program in collaboration with ICN. Youth Impact Hub selects youth teams working on social entrepreneurial projects to participate in a series of 16 weekly workshops using a curriculum modeled on the Presidio Graduate School's MBA in Sustainable Management, which Gino's co-founder attended. The young people in their program all receive mentoring from a young professional, most of whom are small business owners themselves. We are also talking about potentially collaborating on building a for-profit café business alongside ICN that also serves as an incubator for other start-ups (such as both Jaime and Javier are interested in creating) while providing employment, training, and mentoring for ICN students. Focusing on entrepreneurship would enable me to both narrow in

on a particular set of job skills, as Year Up's Gerald Chertavian advised, while still providing enough room to personalize the experience based on the area of interest of each student. Working with the Youth Impact Hub would also enable me to build on their mentoring model to provide both educational/life mentoring and work-based mentoring simultaneously.

Among others, Javier is very excited about the idea. He is enthusiastic about moving closer to starting his own business while also contributing to a social impact for others who come from "backgrounds like his."

Simultaneously furthering his own education and potentially earning a college degree is an added bonus. Moving forward in partnership with this former and current student, along with others, learning together and co-creating a business together through a bi-directional mentoring relationship is a perfect next step in the trajectory of my own learning and growth through this project. It is boundary crossing in many ways (student/mentor, non-profit/for-profit, peer as mentor), and has the potential to fully realize a new, sustainable model for learning, higher education, and workforce development, all based on a variety of mentoring relationships: peer-to-peer, educator-student, professional-apprentice.

## **Implications for Site**

While my initial decision to focus this Innovation College Network pilot on mentoring was based on the time constraints of the residency and the need to concentrate more narrowly on a subset of ICN for the capstone, this focus has greatly influenced my thinking about the overall ICN design. I have learned a lot about mentoring, of course, as well as about what it would take to fully launch ICN. Overall, one of my biggest learnings is how hard this process is. Opening up a college is incredibly challenging, and much harder than opening a high school, since there is basically no existing pathway to do so. Thanks to the opportunity to test out some of the ideas of ICN in this pilot, there are several things that I would do differently the next time around, as well as developing new directions to test further.

There were a number of limitations inherent in my initial plans. First of all, I have learned that launching ICN will take longer than I thought it would. I originally planned to open with 100 students in 2015-16 and now I think that that is at least an additional year out. I also thought that I would create a new and independent organization that provided all of the services laid out in the design. However, I now believe that it would be significantly easier to build off of existing organizations and add to their services. When I first envisioned the ICN model, I had no target population; I wanted to serve every age and people from every background. At the start of the pilot, I had focused the pilot and ICN on out-of-school youth between the ages of 16 and 26 based on the urgings of advisors. However, the students in my pilot were 18 to 30 and I now believe that focusing on older youth who are for the most part beyond

high-school age will help me target my services more and capitalize on the greater maturity and motivation potential among this slightly older population.

Originally, I had not thought very much about the mentoring component of ICN at all and now I see it as the most critical piece, because of its ability to engage young people and move them forward. Mentoring will therefore be a much more intentional strategy of ICN than it was before, and will reflect what I learned throughout this pilot about the importance of holding an inquiry-based, bi-directional stance. It will also include connections to higher education and employment as discussed earlier. These connections and this rather unique approach to mentoring are my non-negotiables for moving forward with ICN.

Broadly through the lens of ICN as a whole, there are three different directions that I am exploring for its next iteration, which could be embarked upon either independently or simultaneously as different tests.

### *Entrepreneurship as a Focus*

As I began thinking through and planning this project, I received advice from a number of people, including Year Up founder Gerald Chertavian, encouraging me to focus on an industry and/or job function so that I could tailor my training toward specific careers. This is the approach of Year Up and others and it has helped them in their outreach and partnerships with their employers. However, after doing this project and capstone, researching the landscape and the needs of the population I plan to serve, and thinking through the ALD framework in relation to this work, I am more convinced than ever that it is critical to start with the young people and personalize the

approach. Beginning with the employers and their needs is the same as beginning with educational institutions and their needs and is in conflict with what I have discovered in this project. The potential of mentoring and of the ICN model is based on the transformative power of meeting young people where they are, listening to them, engaging with them through their passions, interests, and aspirations, and working with them in a holistic way that considers and helps to integrate all aspects of their lives.

While there are challenges to this approach, it might be possible to do this through a focus on entrepreneurship. This would still not preclude students from seeking other types of apprenticeships and pursuing other interests, but could provide an empowering and more focused core curriculum of sorts. I am exploring partnering with the Youth Impact Hub to build off of their program and seek accreditation, as well as developing a partnering for-profit business and incubator and essentially building the work-based side of the Innovation College Network from scratch. This does not mean abandoning the idea of seeking other industry partners, but those might be easier to secure after building out the full model and demonstrating some results in the workforce development space first. Providing curriculum around entrepreneurship (which the Youth Impact Hub does) would also be a way of helping students gain some foundational skills, fostering creative thinking, and developing job skills that would serve them well regardless of whether or not they ultimately join entrepreneurial ventures and pursue entrepreneurship as a career focus. An added benefit to this approach is that there is a lot of attention being paid at the moment, particularly in Oakland, to new socially



responsible small businesses that are also participating in local job creation efforts. Businesses engaged in these networks might be particularly interested in working with young people with some background and training in small business start-ups. Drawbacks to this approach include the fact that start-ups are small and for 100 students, there would need to be 100 different apprenticeships, minus those that work together in a team. Some of these could be started by the youth themselves, but that is a lot harder than working in existing organizations. With an anchor small business incubator organization and space that is designed as a partner to ICN, a cluster of apprenticeships could be created in-house, reducing the number of external apprenticeships needed.

#### *Joining an Existing Organization*

Throughout my extensive outreach efforts, networking and meetings, many people have asked me about working with existing organizations and have counseled me to do so. Those offering advice have rightly pointed out that what I am trying to do is extremely challenging and that if I were to find an organization that was doing one piece of what ICN seeks to do, it would be much easier to work on adding the additional pieces to an existing program. One of the most exciting efforts to have come to my attention in the last few weeks is Generation, the first project to come out of the new McKinsey Social Initiative, “a non-profit organization created by McKinsey & Company to develop innovative, scalable solutions to complex social challenges” (Generation, 2015). Generation’s goal is to employ a million unemployed young people in five countries in five years by providing a short, intensive

boot-camp style training in areas of need (Generation, 2015). They launched their first programs during the current school year in Pittsburgh and in Spain. Generation's materials could have come from this capstone, particularly as they describe the need that they are trying to serve. I am currently in conversation with them about doing some contract work, but ultimately Generation is an example of an organization that is working in the same area as ICN, but without the focus on mentoring or post-secondary degrees. If I were able to become more involved with them, or another like organization, it could be a great way to both gain experience in this space and explore a partnership for ICN.

#### *Creating a College Persistence and Mentoring App*

Although I have focused my efforts on out-of-school youth, part of why there are so many of these young people is because of the significant problem of attrition in higher education. Applying what I've learned in this pilot to creating a tool that could help ICN as well as other existing institutions would be a great way to support the development of ICN while also aiding many more young people than ICN could ever serve. My idea is to create an app that basically facilitates the dissemination of the key aspects of what I've learned about mentoring and personal development over the course of this year. The app would have three basic components: 1. A goal-setting, ALD-based framework that walks students through answering questions about themselves and their aspirations, 2. A tool that includes the graduation requirements of the student's school and tracks the student's progress alongside those requirements, and 3. An interface with mentors who can

engage with the student in the other two categories, providing a tool for mentor-mentee conversations and check-ins. The idea of applying what I've learned more broadly to help other institutions and young people in a relatively simple way is very exciting to me.

Pursuing any or all of these ideas would move this work forward and provide additional information about how ICN, and ICN's mentoring model, needs to be developed to best accomplish its goals.

### *Revising ICN's Mentoring Program*

Mentoring as a stand-alone activity isn't enough, which is why the next iteration of ICN will involve adding one or both of the pieces missing in my pilot: college credit or employment. I would not continue without these changes. Within this different context of having these other connections in place, however, there are four main revisions to the mentoring program itself that I would make based on the data from my experience this year.

#### **1. Develop a Process for Selecting and Training Mentors**

*Learnings:* Given the importance of mentoring in the ICN model, ICN will require a cadre of high quality mentors and methods for training and ensuring consistency. In building out the model, there would obviously be many more mentors than just me. I also had many advantages in my mentoring role this year: knowing the students previously, having their trust, and my years of experience as a mentor and educator. In the pilot, I had the luxury of not thinking beyond what I was doing and what would be most effective. Even with these benefits, I still made trial and error mistakes that I would correct for in developing a clear mentoring plan for ICN. For example, in my first

meetings with students, I didn't ask them to identify goals for our mentoring relationship to clarify what they hoped to gain from it, which is something that I would now include.

*Revision:* Moving forward, I need to create a standardized model and accompanying training, based on all of the things that I discovered about mentoring. The approach that I developed here—and now plan to develop further—is different from typical mentoring programs and thus codifying it and helping others to implement it is critical. The first component is the inquiry approach and would include a list of questions to ask at the different phases of the mentoring relationship, from the initial ALD-based goal-setting questions to questions to ask in three-way student, ICN mentor, and workplace mentor meetings. Other mentoring activities, including outreach and application to employers, and clarifying program requirements would also be included. The app would be a helpful tool to walk mentors through as an aid in all of these areas.

The screening and selection of mentors is also critical, and is something else that I obviously did not do this year. A targeted application process would focus on candidates' previous mentoring experiences and include recommendations from former mentees who can speak to the candidates' abilities in this area.

*Challenges & Tradeoffs:* Efforts to build trust and develop a strong mentoring relationship would be jeopardized if students felt that they were being interviewed and mentors were running through a script. To prevent this, the training would emphasize the authenticity of the relationship building and

would include doing role plays of initial meetings. With such a highly personalized and relational approach, standardizing the training and ultimately the mentoring service will be a challenge, but I think that with the core values and components made explicit and tools for maintaining an inquiry stance in place, it is possible.

## 2. Move Beyond One-on-One Mentoring to a Support Team

*Learnings:* Even with the previous relationships that I had with students and my past mentoring experience, over the course of the pilot I often found it hard to get a response from some of the students and to communicate with them on a regular basis. In addition, I underestimated the value of other relationships and the ALD idea of a “support team.” As useful as one-on-one mentoring is, assembling a larger support team can help students by having more people to speak to about their goals and who can then help keep them on track as they work toward them. Many of the students spoke of the value and rarity of speaking to others about their goals and futures, so this would build a network of such people.

*Revision:* In my next iteration of ICN, each student would have four different mentors: an official ICN mentor, the workplace mentor, a trusted person in their lives that they choose as a mentor, and a peer mentor. The ICN mentor would be the main coordinator of the mentoring program and the person most responsible for checking in with the student about all aspects of their lives, using the app as a communication and organizational aid. The ICN mentor would also be the only one of the mentors being paid to serve in this role, but

the network of other mentors would maximize the mentoring that the students would receive.

Each student would also have a mentor in their place of work who brings expertise both at the site and in that career pathway, helping to provide guidance in the young person's particular area of interest. Students would also select an additional older mentor of their choice that could be based on an existing relationship, helping them to develop the skill of accessing resources that they currently possess as they build their team. For a student like Tania, this person might be her mentor from her scholarship program, allowing her to coordinate the efforts of her different mentors and supporters. For someone like Ja'Nelle, it might encourage her to seek out someone from her past who could serve in this capacity, to access resources that she previously hadn't taken advantage of. Finally, students would also select a peer mentor, a fellow student in the program, building on the recommendations of the pilot students who said that they wanted this component, and providing a perspective from someone in a similar life circumstance with whom to discuss goals and challenges.

An additional benefit of the support team approach to mentoring is that having one official, paid ICN mentor whose work is reinforced by three other people who come from different contexts can ensure a certain baseline level of quality and expectations while allowing for greater personalization and choice, a variety of different perspectives and attributes, and ultimately, more support for the student.

*Challenges & Tradeoffs:* Some challenges to this approach are ensuring that the efforts of the different mentors are coordinated, that mentoring is happening, and that students aren't receiving conflicting messages. The app is one of my main strategies for addressing these challenges; assigning greater control to the one paid staff member mentor is another.

### 3. Create a Student Application Process

*Learnings:* For the pilot, I worked with every student who responded to me, without asking for any commitment or clarifying expectations ahead of time. One of the problems with this approach that I experienced this year was that I had certain expectations, around communication in particular, that not all the students were meeting; without being clear up front and making agreements with one another, some frustration was bound to occur on all sides and it did. I learned that there is a need for a clearer value proposition for all of the stakeholders (students, employers, organizational partners, and mentors). What each participant will both give and receive needs to be clear and compelling. I now believe that the program would be more successful if participating students demonstrated buy-in in some way before or upon beginning the program, helping to ensure more accountability to the relationship and program.

*Revision:* In seeking to serve a range of students, including those with the highest level of need, I was reluctant to add additional barriers for students in the form of an application or selection criteria. However, after reflecting on the value of the pilot and the importance of asking the young people to reflect on their lives and futures, I now believe that an application process that asks

potential students to begin this process could be valuable in terms of helping them take the important first steps I discussed previously. These applications would also help in matching students with their ICN mentors. Regardless of whether or not a student enrolls, there would be value in helping young people begin to think about these questions, as was demonstrated in the pilot.

There are two other ideas that I am considering. The first is to charge an enrollment fee, helping to both subsidize the cost of engaging with students in this initial phase and also helping to ensure a greater commitment on the student's part. However, with finances such an obstacle for these young people, and with the debt that so many of them are already struggling with from other institutions, I am hesitant to do this. If I did, it would be a nominal amount at no more than \$100. The second idea is to have students find their own apprenticeship and employer as a condition of enrollment. This would certainly make ICN's job easier, but given how hard this is, it would greatly reduce the number of students who would participate—and exclude many who need ICN the most.

*Challenges & Tradeoffs:* Putting any additional barriers in place to accessing the program could have the result of discouraging students' participation, especially given a landscape that is already filled with obstacles. However, I think that in terms of the application process, it would be short and relatively easy to complete, as well as carefully designed and framed as first steps in the process, rather than as a tool for making admissions decisions. While it might prevent some young people from working with ICN, the majority of



interested youth would complete it and would therefore be in a better position to benefit from the mentoring as a result.

#### 4. Utilize Full- and Part-Time Mentors

*Learnings:* In my work with my pilot students I brought in others to help at different points. Some of these were former colleagues and friends of mine who have served as mentors to youth over the years. A learning from this experience with my pilot students is the “it takes a village” adage. Some of this is what led me to the support team described above, but it also made me consider how to maximize the tremendous resources that these people bring, even if they weren’t interested in working at ICN full-time.

*Revision:* I now intend to have a mix of full- and part-time mentors. Full-time mentors could help to develop the academic program and assessments in addition to serving as mentors—and they could work with more students—while part-time mentors could bring in quality mentors who might otherwise not be available while ultimately saving money on full-time salaries and benefits. This revision relates to the time required for quality mentoring. This year, I spent on average less than an hour a week with each student including texts and other efforts to track them down. An average of an hour a week per student, including meeting with the work-based mentor at least once a month, could have the desired results (in addition to other ICN activities like weekly community-wide meetings). Part-time mentors would earn approximately \$5,000 a year per student (which is half of the student’s total tuition). On top of a full-time job, five additional hours per week to serve as a mentor to five ICN students would provide \$25,000 per year of extra income, something that

many educators could use. For every 100 students, a core of three full-time and five to ten part-time mentors would comprise an affordable, diverse, and extensive group of mentors.

Another change I would make to how I originally conceptualized and piloted the program is that I would ensure that ICN mentors are matched with students based on interests or other connections that would lead to a successful relationship. As I learned in my pilot in my relationship with Jaime, the co-learning and exploration is stronger where the mentor and mentee have interests in common. Having a larger, more diverse array of mentors in the ICN program would allow for greater flexibility in matching mentors and mentees.

*Challenges & Tradeoffs:* Part-time mentors have the potential to risk the consistency and quality of the mentoring, but once again, I believe the training, the app tool, and regular check-ins with all of the mentors would provide ways to mitigate this. The potential benefits in terms of cost and the diversity and wealth of high quality mentors it could attract would outweigh the potential costs.

Future iterations of the mentoring model and ICN are highly dependent on the context in which they are developed, but the next steps and revisions outlined in this section reflect my most current thinking on the ICN design, informed by this year's pilot. Regardless of the organizational structure or the details of ICN's partnerships, the most critical takeaway from this pilot is the importance of maintaining an inquiry stance and fostering bi- and multi-directional mentoring relationships in working with the young people ICN

seeks to serve. Particularly with out-of-school and disengaged youth, taking the time to listen, helping them develop in the ALD areas, and working with them to define and pursue their own dreams is essential and will be built into whatever future form ICN takes.

## **Implications for Sector**

There are several implications for the sector to come out of this project that relate to K-16 education as a whole, to secondary and post-secondary institutions, higher education, policymaking bodies, non-profits, and businesses. I began developing the Innovation College Network design as my “sector change” project, but quite honestly, while I thought that it could have a significant impact, changing the entire sector seemed overly ambitious and unrealistic. However, through this project and a relatively narrow focus on mentoring, there are broad implications that have emerged from my research and work that could, if acted upon, truly transform the entire education sector.

### **Educate the Whole Person**

At all levels, education needs to be about the whole person and helping young people develop their authentic selves. This includes structures, time, and an orientation toward greater personalization and more meaningful relationships between adults/educators and youth. The focus of our educational system needs to be on fostering “authentic” leaders and human beings, rather than good test-takers or tech workers or some other small slice of who we are as human beings—and who we have the potential to be. Educational systems should be designed around youth, rather than trying to re-design youth and forcing them to fit into the educational systems. Specific recommendations include:

- Building mentoring relationships into school structures. A common theme in both the literature and my experience is the importance of a motivating adult who can help to inspire, guide,

and advise, and help young people navigate the challenges of schooling and life.

- Designing programs that meet youth where they are; that build off their interests using an asset-based approach and that consider education more broadly in terms of subjects and types of activities, such as internships, service learning, etc.

### *Focus on Older Youth*

Given the new discoveries about the adolescent brain and the connections between this population and the social and economic well-being of our nation, we need to focus more on older youth up until the age of 25, rather than considering the job of educating our young people complete when they leave school (Steinberg, 2014). It is problematic that in our current policy environment and practice, we neglect two of the most important age ranges in human development: early childhood and older adolescence. Even as a high school educator for many years, I often encountered fellow educators and policymakers who felt that it was too late to impact change at the high school level; that we need to start earlier. However, cognitive science has shed new light on this issue and confirmed the importance of focusing on adolescence (Steinberg, 2014). There are several ways to do this, including through some of my other recommendations, but a few to consider are:

- Changing educational policy so that, as a nation, we increase our educational responsibility to include pre-school through the age of 25, including providing a free education throughout (such as by making community college free or through facilitating

work-based internship programs.) While the cost would be significant, our current practice of undereducating and underemploying so many of our young people costs us as well (Lochner & Moretti, 2004) (Belfield, Levin, & Rosen, 2012).

- Creating new educational programs for older adolescence, including work-based training and other options for continuing education.

### Create More Higher Education Options

Our K-12 educational system is not the only part of our educational system that needs fixing. The United States' decline in international standing for college degree attainment to number 13 is just one indicator that we have a higher education problem (OECD, 2012). We need to create more higher education options that will better serve current college-going students and increase the number of young people earning college degrees. Currently, the barriers to creating new institutions of higher education are significant, but after learning more about the issues, it is obvious that the status quo is not meeting the needs of the majority of young adults. To address this, the following changes are necessary:

- Similar to what was created through chartering legislation, pathways need to be built for launching new institutions of higher education. Policy changes to the systems of the current accrediting bodies (which are accredited themselves by the federal government) would help facilitate this. Public and private

funding could help as well, as it did with the creation of new K-12 schools.

- Current institutions must do a better job at both preparing and graduating their students. Creating incentives for them to build alternative programs, such as the Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, can help colleges and universities to do this.

### *Strengthen Education and Workplace Connections*

We need to create stronger connections between education and the workplace. This does not mean a choice to promote vocational education at the expense of a broader and more generalized one, as countries such as Switzerland have demonstrated (Hoffman, 2011). It is, however, a way to engage youth by bridging the gaps between school, life outside of school, and the workforce, and integrate their lives in "authentic" ways. Creating new policies and programs can make these connections stronger while building on, strengthening, and improving the learning that occurs at the educational institutions. Examples of ways of doing this include:

- Providing incentives and programs for businesses to create apprenticeship programs for high school and college aged youth.
- Creating more co-op programs such as Northeastern's, at both the high school and college level, and expand upon those that exist, giving academic credit for work-based experiences.

### *Build More Mentoring Opportunities*

Mentoring requires a relatively low investment for very high rewards. Mentoring is a powerful educational tool, particularly for teenagers and young adults. Mentoring as an educational tool can and should be developed in many different contexts. There are many people, particularly non-educators, who would welcome the opportunity to serve as mentors, given the right conditions. Based on my experience in my pilot, my recommendation is to build these opportunities in bi-directional ways where both participants in the relationship are open to learning and growing with one another. For a relatively small amount of time and effort, mentoring can have a transformative effect on the lives of young people, while simultaneously being a tremendously rewarding experience for the mentors. As the ALD framework suggests, having a support network is important, and having more than one mentor in different contexts can provide different types of support:

- Businesses, community-based organizations, and schools should all create opportunities for mentoring that are easy to access and require different levels of commitment that can suit the individual needs of mentors, using a more open-ended, bi-directional mentoring model.
- Incentives, such as release time at work, can be provided to encourage participation.

There has been some energy in recent years around both Linked Learning, which bridges secondary education and the workforce by building



career pathways, and creating new post-secondary institutions, but none of these efforts are sufficiently comprehensive and far-reaching. Furthermore, there does not seem to be much of an emphasis on the other areas that I have highlighted such as educating the whole person, focusing on older youth, and building more mentoring opportunities, and they are equally important. I passionately believe that following up on these recommendations could transform our educational system and the life outcomes of our nation's youth.

## Conclusion

When I started this project and residency, I actually wasn't thinking very deeply about mentoring. What I thought made my Innovation College Network idea unique was the financial model of building tuition costs into apprenticeship salaries and the focus on work-based and experience-based learning. Although mentoring, both at the work site and the educational institution, was a key part of the concept, I wasn't as interested in that piece at the onset. I had also not spent much time analyzing my past experiences with students through the lens of individual relationships, either my own or those of my colleagues, to determine what made them successful or not. This process and project has helped me to distill what I now believe is possibly the most powerful educational tool for working with adolescents and young adults: the one-on-one mentoring relationship.

I now believe that mentoring is a critical component of successful youth development in any context. This obviously includes my own project and is now much more intentionally a part of the Innovation College Network design, but I'm also convinced that it is an important solution for our educational institutions more broadly. In the previous section, I articulated implications for the education sector that grew out of this project; now, in conclusion, I'll summarize the elements of mentoring relationships that I believe are the most critical for fostering the growth and development of youth. The most effective mentoring, including my own mentoring in this pilot, requires the following:

- Building trust through listening to young people, hearing their hopes, fears, and dreams without the mentors imposing theirs.

- Communicating compassion and caring for the youth—as well as a belief in their potential— in all aspects of their lives.
- Beginning with the young person and meeting them where they are rather than trying to fit them into someone else’s vision of who they should be.
- Working with young people to develop their own authentic leadership, helping them to become more self-aware, articulate their values, discover their motivations, build a support team, and live an integrated life.
- Being a learner alongside them, exploring possibilities with them as they consider their futures and their pathways.

In any context and structure, these elements make for powerful mentoring relationships and can help transform the lives of youth.

Building mentoring into current educational programs and institutions would have a tremendous impact on the education field. For example, both high school and college graduation rates would be increased if every young person had a mentor who took the approach outlined above. Similarly, rethinking existing relationships between teachers and students as mentors and mentees would also yield improved results. Redesigning education around the elements highlighted above is a major departure from the current status quo that would allow all young people to shine and fulfill their potential by attending to their needs and their growth in a more holistic way.

Some problems are bigger than those that fall within our current educational institutions and the students that they serve. While the

recommendations above would transform existing institutions, much still needs to be done to affect the many young people not in school. There are numerous reasons to reprioritize older youth and create more alternative career and education pathways for those who are no longer in school. We need to see education as a pathway to careers and fulfilling, productive lives, and deliberately build these connections. Our nation's economic and social health would be significantly improved were we to do so. The Innovation College Network is one effort that can have an impact in this area, using the strategy of mentoring. Many more such efforts are needed at a systemic level to make the type of large-scale change that our nation needs.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A Slide Deck for the Innovation College Network

## Innovation College Network


Summary Deck

### Under-education: a collective challenge




**For individuals**

The lack of a college degree is directly linked to lower lifetime earning potential<sup>1</sup>, and yet 60% of Americans do not hold a post-secondary degree<sup>2</sup>.



**For employers**

There is a gap between what employers need and the skills and credentials that potential employees have. A 2012 McKinsey survey reported that only 42% of employers feel that new hires have been adequately prepared for the job market.<sup>3</sup>



**For society**

The societal cost of under-education is staggering. For instance, a 1% increase in the high school completion rate of all men ages 20-60 would leave the United States as much as \$1.4 billion per year in reduced costs from crime.<sup>4</sup>

1. U.S. Census  
2. U.S. Census  
3. LinkedIn & Co  
4. Monahan, P.  
March, 2011

### If a college degree is so important, why don't more Americans earn one?

Three main barriers stand in the way of more Americans attaining post-secondary education

- 1 Cost**, both for tuition/fees and opportunity cost of lost working hours
- 2 Perceived lack of relevance** to interests and real-world applications
- 3 Inadequate support and advising** to cope with challenges both inside and outside the classroom

### Innovation College Network (ICN) aims to solve this collective challenge by overcoming the barriers to educational attainment

**Our mission**

ICN provides a groundbreaking new college model that prepares students for successful careers and increases the number of people earning college degrees.

**Our theory of change**

If ICN creates a model for post-secondary education that is affordable, directly relevant to student interests and career goals, & contains a strong system of support, then more Americans will earn college degrees and gain the skills needed for career success.

## THE ICN MODEL

### Innovation College Network

- Part **employment agency**, part **internal human resources support**, part **college**
- Providing quality **recruitment, training and staffing solutions** to employers
- Offering **employment, support and education** to students

### ICN provides an integrated solution to educational barriers to help students succeed

Cost	Engagement & Relevance	Advising & Support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continued Employment</li> <li>Tuition covered as a part of the student's salary</li> <li>Adds "apprenticeship" component</li> <li>Education works around employment, not the other way around</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Based on student interest &amp; need</li> <li>Connected to the real world, life, and work</li> <li>Job-embedded</li> <li>Highly personalized</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Weekly one-on-one advising</li> <li>Ongoing life and academic support</li> <li>Coordinates all aspects of the program to fulfill requirements and fill academic gaps</li> </ul>

College degree and career success

### Sample student schedule

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
9:00 AM	Apprenticeship	Apprenticeship	Apprenticeship	Apprenticeship	Apprenticeship
11:00 AM		Meeting with mentor			On-the-job training session
12:00 PM				Lunch meeting with advisor	
1:00 PM	Apprenticeship	Apprenticeship	Apprenticeship	Apprenticeship	Apprenticeship
5:00 PM	Work ends	Work ends	Work ends	Work ends	Work ends
6:00 PM	ICN community meeting		Work on online course	English class at ICN	

### Summary of key activities

- Highly individualized learning program** centered around a **job placement** that provides funding, professional development, and skills training
- Additional trainings and courses** as needed to supplement on-the-job education
- Innovative approach to evaluation** that assigns credit based on core competencies developed in both academic and professional settings
- Advisor to meet with weekly**, helping shape course of study and providing support for academic and life needs

### Who are the students?

ICN will serve two tracks of students:

- 1 High school dropouts, ages 16-26
- 2 High school graduates who are not enrolled in a bachelor-degree program or on a career path with growth potential, ages 18-26

**Rationale:** Serving two tracks allows for pilot partnership to serve a highly vulnerable population, while also enabling experimentation with employer-partners that require student-workers with a stronger track record.

### ICN provides unique professional and educational value to students

Through ICN students can:

- Earn an accredited **college degree**
- Gain **professional experience** through a **job placement** that also funds the costs of your education and living expenses
- Create an **individualized program** tailored to your interests and experiences
- Work with mentors who provides **work, life, and academic support**

### ICN also provides significant value to employers

#### The problem

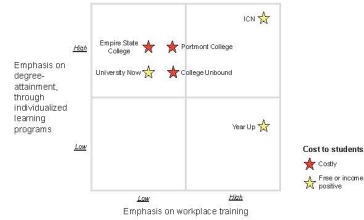
A **skills gap** exists between what employers are seeking and what they are able to find. A 2012 McKinsey survey reported that only 4 of 10 employers feel that new hires have been adequately prepared for the job market.<sup>3</sup>

Partnering with ICN gives employers a means to:

- Identify and evaluate new talent in **cost-effective** and **low-risk** ways
- Receive support from ICN in creating **training** materials and providing supplemental education to **increase employee skills**
- Help meet hiring goals around **workplace diversity**
- Strengthen **positive impact** on local community

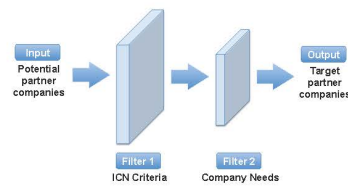
3. McKinsey, Farrell, & Korman, 2012

### ICN's unique value proposition makes it stand out among peer organizations



### EMPLOYER PARTNERSHIPS

### Potential partner companies are targeted based on ICN criteria then on company needs



### ICN selects partner companies based on several criteria

Priority	Criteria	Rationale
High	Suitable positions available	• Positions must provide learning opportunities and wages equivalent of \$12/hour
	Strong committed HR unit	• HR unit must be "bought-in" and administratively capable of implementing program
	Willingness to work closely with ICN team	• Company management must be a collaborator with ICN to refine and troubleshoot the program
Medium	Stable profitability	• Financial stability provides a more ideal environment for hiring and training ICN students
	Entrepreneurial mindset	• Company requires an entrepreneurial mindset to learn to implement new partnership
Low	Strong reputation	• Partnering with big name companies helps ICN to scale its students and partners
	Geography/location	• ICN founding team prefers Bay Area due to professional network and personal ties

### Target partner companies have one or more needs that reflect ICN's value proposition

Need	Description
Talent scarcity	• ICN can provide greatest value to companies facing shortage of talent
Image improvement	• Companies needing to improve their public image can do so by partnering with ICN
Value fulfillment	• Values-driven companies can fulfill their commitments through ICN
Workforce diversity	• ICN's diverse student population can help companies to develop a more diverse workforce
Employee motivation	• Mentoring ICN students can be a source of motivation for employees
Stronger community involvement	• ICN is one way companies can get involved with local communities

### ICN has identified a range of target partner companies within a few key industries

Government, Healthcare, and Technology satisfy the most criteria		ICN Criteria										Partner Needs		
Industry	Company	Talent Scarcity	Image Improvement	Value Fulfillment	Workforce Diversity	Employee Motivation	Stronger Community Involvement	Talent Scarcity	Image Improvement	Value Fulfillment	Workforce Diversity	Employee Motivation	Stronger Community Involvement	Value Fulfillment
Airlines	JetBlue	X	X											
	United	X	X											
	BP	X	X	X										
Energy	Exxon Mobil	X	X	X										
	General	X	X	X	X									
	San Jose	X	X	X	X									
Government	San Jose	X	X	X	X									
	San Jose	X	X	X	X									
	San Jose	X	X	X	X									
Healthcare	Amgen	X	X	X	X									
	Genentech	X	X	X	X									
	Kaiser Permanente	X	X	X	X									
Logistics	DHL	X	X	X	X									
	FedEx	X	X	X	X									
	UPS	X	X	X	X									
Technology	Amazon	X	X	X	X	X								
	Google	X	X	X	X	X								
	Facebook	X	X	X	X	X								

## ROLLOUT TIMELINE & PILOT

### Rollout timeline



### Piloting the model

#### Key details

- Launch during 2014-15 school year
- 5-20 students total, focused on apprenticeship and advising
- Test of value proposition for employers & students, and apprenticeship model
- Partnering with the Mills College School of Education

#### Potential partners

- Additional partnerships in pipeline
- Conversations with leaders in other states about future sites (LA, TN)

### Initial Pilot Students

#### Jocue

- 19 years old
- Completed high school, started Heald College with promise of financial aid that didn't come through; left without taking courses but with \$4,000 in debt
- Interested in graphic design and photography and doing some projects in this area
- Was employed as security and other unskilled labor positions outside of area of interest and talent; currently looking for work
- Seeking position and experience in graphic design or other visual arts related business



### Initial Pilot Students

#### Martina

- 21 years old
- Completed high school, started at Alameda College but discontinued, owes money to the college
- Interested in a career in health care and specifically as an ultrasound technologist
- Currently working at Target; needs to help the family and bring in an income



### Pilot performance measurements

Launch goals	Interim goals	Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5-20 students recruited</li> <li>Partnering employers signed on</li> <li>Advisors &amp; mentors identified</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More than 75% of students successfully complete apprenticeships for the duration of the pilot</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>75% of completing students want to continue beyond pilot</li> <li>Employers report satisfaction with the pilot</li> </ul>

### Pilot Student Testimonials

- [It's] motivating; you have all these resources that we wouldn't find ourselves, all these connections.
- You start to realize you actually can do it, there are programs, there are people out there who want to help you.
- There is still a chance for you to do what you want. Whatever career, whatever you want to do. It's not too late, even though you've wasted time, there's still time.

### THE ICN TEAM

### Laura Flaxman, Founder



- 20+ years in education
- Founded over 20 schools (& principal of 2: Life Academy and ARISE High School in Oakland, CA)
- Co-founded Oakland Education Fund
- Author of *Small Schools, Big Ideas*
- Instructor at Berkeley City College
- Echoing Green Black Male Achievement Semi-Finalist 2014
- Harvard Educational Innovation Pitch Competition Finalist 2014
- Future of School Challenge Finalist 2014
- Harvard University Education Leadership Doctorate (Ed.L.D.) expected 2015

### ICN Advisors

Name	Title	Organization
Gerald Chertavian	Founder & CEO	Year Up
Keenan Davis	Vice President, Partnerships	My College Foundation & Port College
Kathy Schultz	Dean	School of Education, Mills Coll
Tim Dibble	Founding & Managing Partner	Alta Communications
Sonia Marjon	Associate Professor, Director of Bennett Center for Integrated Arts and Enterprise	Ohio State University
Glen Roth	Strategic Partnerships Lead	Google
Elizabeth City	Director of Education Leadership Doctoral Program	Harvard Graduate School of Education
Tarin Ray	Strategic Consultant	Triple Threat Advisors
Emma Paulino	Community Organizer	Oakland Community Organizat

### APPENDIX

### Preliminary Logic Model

Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build partnerships with local businesses, organizations, districts, municipalities</li> <li>• Recruit staff &amp; students</li> <li>• Create non-profit</li> <li>• Launch pilot, open schools</li> <li>• Seek accreditation</li> <li>• Develop mastery-based assessment system that includes ways of giving credit for non-traditional learning experiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 100% of students participate in personalized program of study</li> <li>• Apprenticeships provided for all students that want them</li> <li>• 100% of students participate in one-on-one academic advising</li> <li>• 100% of students participate in weekly community meetings</li> <li>• Accreditation granted to give 2 and 4 year degrees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A minimum of 75% of students earn associate's or bachelor's degrees</li> <li>• A minimum of 75% of students successfully complete apprenticeships</li> <li>• A minimum of 80% of students either pursue their education or continue in their employment upon leaving ICN</li> <li>• Employers report satisfaction with the ICN program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A more educated populace</li> <li>• A higher percent of people engage school and the workforce in communities served by ICN</li> <li>• A healthier economy</li> <li>• Lower crime rate</li> <li>• Higher economic educational attainment for traditionally underserved population</li> </ul>

### Potential partner companies considered

Akzo	Fedex	PepsiCo
Alta Bates Summit	Four Seasons	PG&E
Amazon	Gap	Polar
Amgen	GE	Procter & Gamble
Apple	Genentech	Safeway
Audiobook	Google	Salesforce
Bain & Company	Holiday Inn	Southwest
B&G	Hyatt	Square
Bectel	J&J	Stanford
Bloomberg LP	JetBlue	Twitter
BP	John Muir Health	UC Berkeley
Chevron	Kaiser	UCSF
City & County of San Francisco	Kaiser Permanente	Unilever
City of Oakland	Len Strauss	United Airlines
City of San Jose	LinkedIn	UPS
Clorox	Lucas Film	USC/USCO
Coca-cola	Mckinsey & Company	Virgin America
Codex	Nestle	Vista
Delta Airlines	Microsoft	Walmart
DHL	Monterio	Wegman's
Dorco/Labs	Nestle	Wells Fargo
Dow/Chemical	Novartis	Williams & Sonoma
Electronic Arts	Oracle	Yip
Facebook	Pandora	Zappos

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**Appendix B** Innovation College Network/Strategic Project-Related Meetings

<b>Last Name</b>	<b>First Name</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Organization</b>
Bailey	John	Director, Workforce Investment Board	City of Oakland
Birnbaum	Jeremiah	Founder and CEO	San Francisco School of Digital Filmmaking
Biselli	Danielle	Program Manager	Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship
Branch	Ashanti	Founder and Executive Director	Ever Forward Club
Brody Lopez	Iris	CEO	Ryals & Associates
Bull	Sam	Executive Director and Founder	LEAPNOW
Chaconas	Dennis	Chancellor and Board President	Reach Institute for School Leadership
Chatmon	Chris	Director, Office of African American Male Achievement	Oakland Unified School District
Chertavian	Gerald	Founder and CEO	Year Up
Cohen	Sam	President	Energy Solutions
Corona	José	CEO	Inner City Advisors
Croager	Rani	Founder	Uptima Boot Camp
Croteau	Gregg	Executive Director	UTEC
Cumes	Terry	Chief Student Officer	Minerva Project
Daley	Ben	Chief Academic Officer	High Tech High
Dao	Stacy	Researcher	Public Health Institute
Davis	Adam	Director of Clinical Grants and Program Development	Children's Hospital Oakland
Davis	Keenan	Vice President of Partnerships	Mount St. Mary's Online
Dibble	Tim	Founder and Managing Partner	Alta Communications
Fields	Jamal	Resident	New Schools Venture Fund
Freundlich	Tim	President, Managing Partner	Impact Assets, Good Capital
Garcia	Romeo	President	Peralta Community College Foundation
Garza	Gerry	Director	Oakland Public Library
Greiff	Debbie	Consultant	Debbie Greiff Consulting
Hambrecht	Bill	Founder and Chairman	WR Hambrecht & Co
Hayes	Miya		UC Office of the President
Kapor	Mitch	Co-Chair	Kapor Center for Social Impact
Klein	Jonathan	Executive Director	Great Oakland Public Schools
Laetsch	Krishen	Strategic Advancement	University Now
Littlefield	Allison	Board Member	Littlefield Foundation



Livingston Louie	Sanford Darien	Financial Services Executive CEO	NorCal FDC East Bay Economic Development Alliance ConnectEd
Lutzenberger-Phillips	Jenn	Director, Learning, Teaching and Pathway Development	
Magana	Justin	Chief Engineer	REL Acoustics Ltd.
Marchevsky	Miriam	Project Manager & Designer	Mister Important Design
Martin	Rob Alan	Director/Founder	Solgate Studios
Marx	Frederick	Director, Filmmaker	Warrior Films
Mecca	Anthony	President	California Mentor Foundation
Monroe	Karen	Superintendent	Alameda County Office of Education
Montgomery	Tulane	Partner, Pathways Fund	New Profit
Nelson	Ben	Founder	Minerva Project
Parham	Trevor	Founder	Oakstop
Pastori-Ng	Gino	Co-Founder & Co-Director	Youth SEED and Youth Impact Hub
Paulino	Emma	Organizer	Oakland Community Organizations
Pete	Gilbert	Workforce and Economic Development Coordinator	Oakland Unified School District
Phillips	Kimberly	Provost	Mills College
Quezada	Ricardo	Youth Coordinator, Workforce Investment Board	City of Oakland
Roth	Glen	Head of Business Development	Google
Route-Chatmon	LaShawn	Executive Director	National Equity Project
Schaff	Libby	Mayor and Former City Councilwoman	City of Oakland
Somerville	Bill	President and Founder	Philanthropic Ventures Foundation
Stanley	Brian	Executive Director	Oakland Education Fund
Stemm-Calderon	Zoe	Resident	Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
Stewart	Tom	President	Patten College
Stroud	Precious	Consultant	PJS Consultants
Thomas	Hae-Sin	CEO	Education for Change Public Schools
Tran	Vinh	Principal	Skyline High School
Wade	Gene	Founder and CEO	University Now
Washington	Arthur	CEO	NorCal FDC